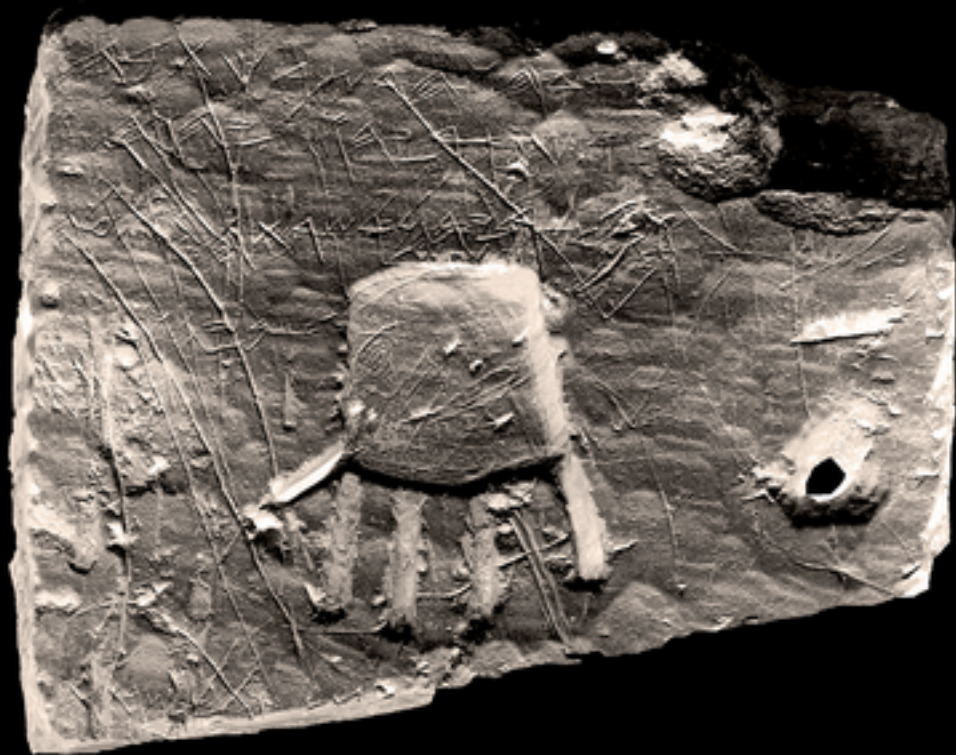


MATTHEW J. SURIANO



A HISTORY OF
DEATH IN THE
HEBREW BIBLE

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MATTHEW J. SURIANO

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As I look back, I can recognize the origins of this book in a series of talks and lectures, starting with a presentation I gave on the Judahite bench tomb at the Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in San Diego in 2007. The session, chaired by Louise Hitchcock and Emily Anderson, provided the motivation to explore further my theories regarding death and Sheol. I continued to develop my thoughts on these subjects, and the following year I offered them in a presentation at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Arabian Studies held at the British Museum. The subject that year was "Death, Burial, and the Transition to the Afterlife in Arabia and Adjacent Regions," and the experience allowed me to envision new ways of exploring the topic of the tomb in biblical literature. While I was visiting faculty at Indiana University, I was invited to present my research at the Jewish Studies Workshop, organized by the Robert A. and Sandra S. Borns Institute of Jewish Studies in 2011. There I benefited greatly from the comments I received from Shaul Magid, Sarah Imhoff, Brandon Bayne, and Jeffrey Veidlinger. The next year I expanded my ideas and presented them at the Divinity School of the

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College Park, August 7, 2017

Abbreviations

- ABD *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by R. Kittel, K. Elliger, W. Rudolph, G. E. Weil, H. P. Rüger, and A. Schenker. Amended 5th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
- BLeI Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions
- CAD *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Martha T. Roth, editor-in-charge. 21 vols. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010.
- CIS *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*. Parts 1–5. Paris: e. Reipublicae typographeo, 1881–1962.
- COS *The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1992–2016.
- DAPT Deir ‘Alla Plaster Text
- DDD *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995. 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- DSSSE *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- GKC Gesenius, W. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd English ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
- JPS Jewish Publication Society
- KAI *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. Edited by H. Donner and W. Röllig. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962–2002.
- KHinn Ketef Hinnom silver amulet inscriptions
- KTU *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU³)*. Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and

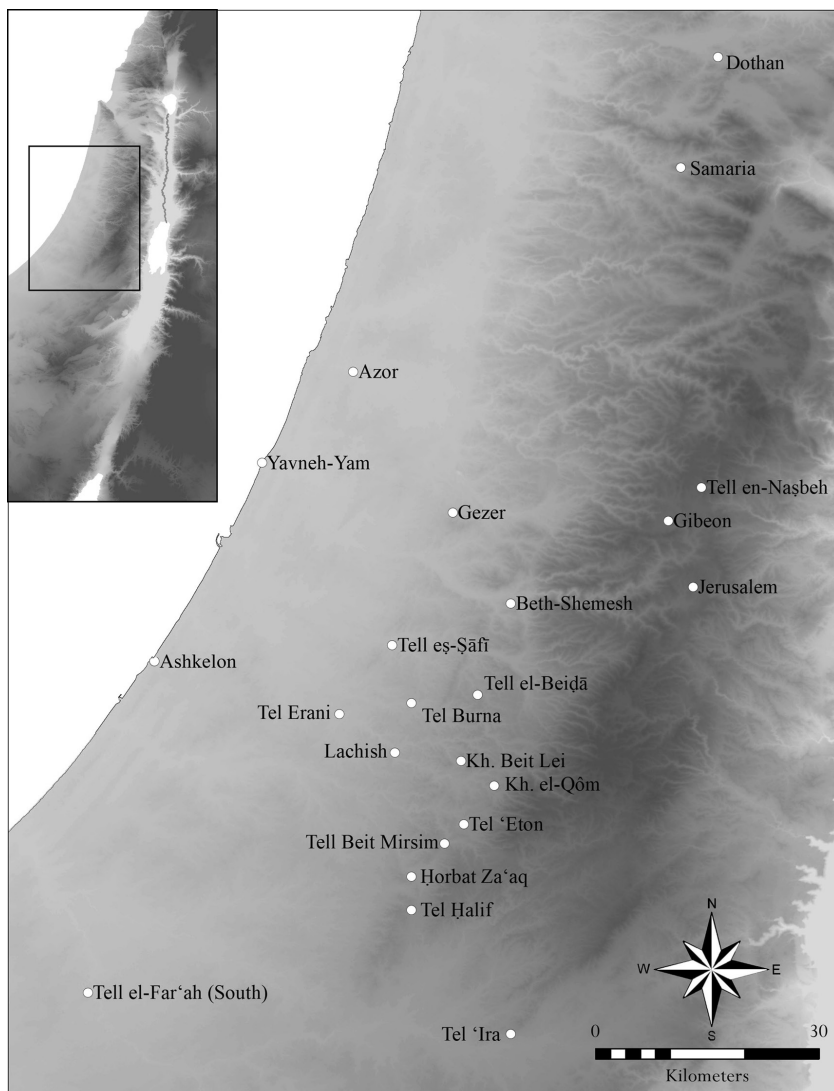
- J. Sanmartin. 3rd ed. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, 360/1. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013.
- LXX Septuagint
- MT Masoretic Text
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version
- OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009.
- Qom Khirbet el-Qôm inscriptions
- Silw Silwan inscriptions
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck, H.-J. Fabry, and H. Ringgren. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2015.

Note on Sources

REFERENCES IN THIS book to biblical literature pertain to the Hebrew Bible, the academic term for scriptures shared alike in Judaism (as Tanakh) and Christianity (as Old Testament). Of course there is some variation between the two; thus citations to biblical literature will follow the verse numbering of the Masoretic Text (MT). I provide my own translations for Hebrew (both inscriptions and biblical texts), Aramaic, and Phoenician sources, unless otherwise noted. When necessary, the Phoenician and Aramaic sources are transliterated in Latin script; however, epigraphic Hebrew sources are rendered in Hebrew block script. The block script-transliterations of epigraphic Hebrew do not use the final letters (*sofit*). The Hebrew inscriptions are referenced according to the sigla of *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (Dobbs-Allsopp et al., 2004). Phoenician and Aramaic sources are referenced according to their numbering in *KAI*, when applicable.

Archaeological Periodization and Chronology/BCE

Middle Bronze Age	1900–1530
Late Bronze Age	1530–ca. 1200/1150
Iron Age IA	1200–ca. 1140/1130
Iron Age IB	1150/1130–ca. 980
Iron Age IIA	ca. 980–ca. 840/830
Iron Age IIB	ca. 840/830–732/701
Iron Age IIIA	732/701–605/586
Iron Age IIIB	586–520
Persian Period	550–330
Hellenistic Period	330/323–63/31



Map by Amy Karoll.

Prolegomenon

THE AFTERLIFE EMBODIED

And you will go to your fathers in peace, you will be buried at a ripe old age, ¹⁶ but [your] fourth generation will return here, because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

—Genesis 15:15–16

THE QUESTION OF what lies beyond death is one of humanity's great mysteries. Judaism and Christianity have sought—and continue to search—for answers to this question in their sacred scriptures. To a certain extent, this endeavor has led to the construction of ideologies that have shaped and defined death in Western cultures, including theological systems such as eschatology and soteriology. Inherent within these concepts of the end of days (Rev 20:1–10), the world to come (*m. Sanhedrin*. 10:1), and postmortem salvation is the well-known afterlife dichotomy of paradise or punishment (see, e.g., Matt 5:18–30; Rev 20:11–15). This exegetical enterprise founders, however, when it is traced back to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament where there is no such dichotomy. With the exception of Dan 12:1–3, which dates to a late stage in the Hebrew Bible's history, there is no vetting of the dead. Instead the afterlife ideal is presented as reunion with dead kin, exemplified in the biblical passage quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Because this ideal finds its basis in the tomb rather than heaven, scholars tend to assume that there was no promise of an afterlife in the Hebrew Bible. Often they proffer in its place an interpretation of death as a type of fatalism, reading Old Testament texts as resigned toward the dead and their burial. But this view takes as its starting point attributes such as the promise of heaven or the threat of hell, attributes that the Hebrew Bible does not have. A better approach is to examine the problem of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible according to its own terms, by looking at the culture of the biblical writers rather than reading our own cultural assumptions into their texts. The purpose of this book is not to answer the mystery of death. Instead,

this study seeks to understand the ways the Hebrew Bible discusses death as a concept and to trace the history of this concept in both textual and archaeological sources.

The Hebrew Bible's attitude toward death and the dead is decidedly different from modern, Western concepts of the afterlife. It idealizes the family tomb, and here the fate of the dead is intricately tied to the condition of the body. In this sense, the descriptions of death, dying, and the dead in the Old Testament are more similar to those found in ancient Near Eastern and classical sources. Even so, comparing death imagery in the Hebrew Bible with ancient Near Eastern parallels is only slightly more helpful than contrasting it with New Testament and later Christian concepts of heaven and hell. Parallels with the Epic of Gilgamesh, for example, are productive but limited. They provide us with non-Western perspectives on death, yet they risk obscuring the cultural distinctiveness of the Levant, particularly Judah and Israel. The study of death in the Hebrew Bible should be nuanced according to the terms it uses and in light of its own cultural background. The best parallels are found in the mortuary remains of the southern Levant during the first millennium BCE, specifically the tombs of Iron Age Judah.

In spite of the exegetical difficulties involved in the Old Testament's images of death, scholars often fall back on simple explanations. The afterlife becomes nothing more than a continued existence inside the tomb. This idea is essentially correct, but the concept of death in the Hebrew Bible is much more sophisticated. It is difficult to understand this concept without knowledge of the mortuary culture of the biblical writers. The purpose of this book is to examine the intricate imagery associated with death and the dead in biblical literature by integrating the study of this literature with the archaeological interpretation of mortuary remains. I will show that the concept of death was centered specifically on the treatment of the dead rather than their destiny. Death, in the world of the Old Testament writers, was a dynamic process—which we will call *dying*—rather than a static event. Once we see death as a process, we will come to see additional aspects of death that are interconnected: death as transition and the relational nature of the dead.

Death as transition may seem obvious and unsurprising, but the nature of that transition is worth exploring further. In ancient Israel, early Judaism, and the Hebrew Bible, the transition of the dead did not involve the migration of an immortal soul to some otherworldly destination. It was not a question of place—heaven or hell—but of status. The biblical ideal was the status of *ancestor*, which provided the dead with a certain form of immortality. But this status was conditioned upon how the living interacted with the dead; hence, death was relational. A brief and very selective history of biblical

interpretation will show how scholars have struggled to understand biblical concepts such as Sheol and the soul because they have failed to recognize the relational and transitional aspects of death.¹

The Problem of Death in the Hebrew Bible

The imagery associated with death and the dead in the Hebrew Bible is vague, ambiguous, and at times seemingly contradictory. Not only has this challenged scholars, it has also led to somewhat confusing descriptions. The fate of the dead can be variously described as either residence in the tomb or in a netherworld that was not unlike those of Mesopotamian and Greek sources.² For example, two twentieth-century scholars, Johannes Pedersen and Walter Eichrodt, explained the biblical concept of postmortem existence as predicated upon the state of the corpse.³ They differed regarding Sheol, the biblical place of the dead. Eichrodt saw Sheol as a later development that was conceptually linked with ideas of the netherworld found in Mesopotamia and ancient

1. For an excellent overview of scholarship, see C. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 133–201. Many of the issues involved in past scholarship on death in the Hebrew Bible are well addressed in J. D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). The history of the subject in Jewish and Christian traditions is treated by K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 219 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 4–12. Unfortunately, his thesis that a “beatific afterlife” was originally a Canaanite ideal is unsustainable on multiple levels, beginning with his assumptions regarding the history and development of Israelite culture; see M. S. Smith and E. Bloch-Smith, “Death and Afterlife in Ugarit and Israel,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108 (1988): 277–84. On this note, my book will not trace the development of heaven or hell as afterlife beliefs, although their roots can be found in certain aspects of Near Eastern thought; see N. Wyatt, “The Concept and Purpose of Hell: Its Nature and Development in West Semitic Thought,” *Numen* 56 (2009): 161–84; S. L. Sanders, “The First Tour of Hell: From Neo-Assyrian Propaganda to Early Jewish Revelation,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 9 (2009): 151–69; and J. E. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

2. See, for example, the exhaustive treatment of Near Eastern and classical parallels in N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament*, *Bibliotheca et Orientalia* 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) and, more briefly, B. S. Childs, “Death and Dying in Old Testament Theology,” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (New York: Four Quarters, 1987), 89–91.

3. J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1:179–81; and W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., *Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 2:212–14. Pedersen’s concept of soul and body is much more nuanced and will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Greece⁴—and, as such, distinct from the notion that the dead continue to reside in the tomb.⁵ Yet Sheol is described using tomb-like terminology. With this in mind, and in light of the idea that *all* are destined for Sheol, Pedersen argued that postmortem existence in ancient Israel involved both Sheol and the tomb—they were of one nature.⁶ Although he understood the importance of the tomb in the Israelite concept of an afterlife, for him postmortem existence according to the Old Testament was a benign “Ur-grave” where everyone went after death: “the grave is both good and bad. In it dwell the fathers, and the family keeps its graves close by it; but, nevertheless, it is the home of death and in so far the enemy of life.”⁷ Eichrodt also understood the importance of the tomb, yet for him the biblical ideal of reunion with dead kin and the dreariness of Sheol were mutually exclusive.⁸

Pedersen’s contemporary, Robert Pfeiffer, offered an even more extreme view. Like Eichrodt, he rejected any connection between Sheol and the tomb.⁹ Yet, while Pfeiffer similarly assigned an early date to the idea of the tomb as the place of postmortem existence, he referred to this as a “rather dismal idea . . . [that] survived in the following expressions: ‘he was gathered to his people’ (Gen. 25:8); ‘bury me with my fathers’ (Gen. 49:29); and the like.”¹⁰ In other words, what the biblical writers considered an ideal in death was actually quite miserable. One could say that these were the interpretations of a bygone generation, but similar statements can be found in scholarship from the last few decades. For instance, in an essay published in 1995, Paolo Xella wrote: “there is a kind of contradiction in Hebrew thought between an abode for the dead in the afterlife, on the one hand, and the dead’s continued existence in the tomb, on the other.”¹¹ Similarly in a chapter on death in wisdom literature, Roland Murphy described postmortem existence in biblical literature as “non-life.” Murphy acknowledged that Sheol and the tomb were

4. Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:210–13.

5. Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:213.

6. Pedersen, *Israel*, 2:460–62.

7. Pedersen, *Israel*, 2:462.

8. Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:213.

9. R. H. Pfeiffer, *Religion in the Old Testament: The History of a Spiritual Triumph* (New York: Harper, 1961), 18.

10. Pfeiffer, *Religion*, 104.

11. P. Xella, “Death and the Afterlife in Canaanite and Hebrew Thought,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson, 4 vols. (New York: Hendrickson, 1995), 3:2068.

conceptually linked in the Old Testament, and this link conveyed a type of postmortem existence. Yet he refused to call this an *afterlife*; instead, it was an *afterdeath*.¹²

It is just as unhelpful to label the Hebrew Bible's concepts of the postmortem as afterdeath as it is to refer to them as dreary. But what are we to make of the biblical imagery? The terms used in reference to death are admittedly ambiguous. Our challenge is not just to define postmortem existence as the tomb, Sheol, or both. Once we recognize that postmortem existence is predicated upon the corpse, our understanding of the biblical Hebrew term for "soul" or "self"—נפש—also becomes complicated. This problem is often addressed in terms of how the self is defined in the Hebrew Bible. But it is intricately linked with issues of postmortem belief because the term can be applied beyond the boundaries that separate the living and the dead. The Hebrew Bible's concept of soul (נפש) is inconsistent with the Platonic/Cartesian mapping of a mind-body dichotomy for multiple reasons. To begin with, the נפש is not inherently immortal, nor is it an incorruptible entity separate from the material body. The term is used at times in the Hebrew Bible to signify a dead body (see, e.g., Lev 19:28; 21:1); therefore the issue is one of corporality. René Descartes's mechanistic interpretation of the body allowed for the existence of an intangible element referred to as the *mind* or, following Plato's concept, the *soul*. Yet this dualism did not exist in ancient Israel. So what exactly was the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible? As the foregoing quotations attest, for many biblical scholars the afterlife absent of any immortal, disembodied soul becomes nothing more than a shadowy abode of lifeless bodies. There is no graduated state of being, nor is there any achieved status beyond death. There is simply the corpse inside the tomb.

The assertion that a postmortem existence inside the tomb is dreary and bleak is built upon a poor understanding of embodiment. The body is never defined or theorized; it is simply assumed. More problematically, it is often assumed in a form reminiscent of Platonic/Cartesian dualism, except without the intangible element of soul or mind. Yet the opposite system, monism, is also unhelpful. The idea of the נפש as a psychosomatic

12. R. E. Murphy, "Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," in *Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaism of Antiquity*, vol. 4 of *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 101. To refer to this as *a-mortality*, as does H. Nutkowicz, *L'homme face à la mort au royaume de Juda: rites, pratiques et représentation* (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 334, is just as problematic. Nutkowicz is followed by S. L. Cook, "Death, Kinship, and Community: Afterlife and the תּוֹחַ Ideal in Israel," in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. Dutcher-Walls (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 107.

unity typically fails to explain what happens once the body ceases to exist. Pedersen was aware of this dilemma when he wrote: “as long as the body is a body, the soul is closely connected with it.”¹³ Rather than an entity that was freed from the body at death, as in the classical definition of the soul, the נֶפֶשׁ—which can die—remained one with the body, and slowly they perished together. In this definition, which will be addressed further in chapter 4, Pedersen acutely ties death to bodily action by tracing it through decomposition. But we must ask: Does the decomposed body mark the finality of death? Can this process be tied to the death of a soul? Is this the only mode of existence for the body? The monistic interpretation presupposes an affirmative answer to these questions, and this presupposition precludes any sense of a meaningful afterlife in ancient Israel. The problem of post-mortem existence in the Hebrew Bible is thus intricately connected with how the body is understood.

How one approaches the problem of the embodiment of the dead depends on how one understands immortality. Baruch Spinoza notably rejected the immortality of the soul as a concept with any basis in the Hebrew Bible, and in place of this Western sense of immortality he correctly perceived a desire for familial continuity. This line of thought has become the predominant position in biblical scholarship but requires further qualification. Spinoza’s rejection of immortality may seem to require rejection of an afterlife as well. But what he described can be called *functional immortality*. Put simply, this immortality was the preservation and endurance of one’s legacy. Indeed, the idea was quite common throughout the ancient Near East.¹⁴ A famous example is found in Tablet XII of the Standard Epic of Gilgamesh—itsself a translation of the Sumerian tale Bilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld—where the ghost of Enkidu returns to the realm of the living and describes the afterlife to his companion through a series of questions and answers:

‘Did [you see the man with one son?]’ ‘I saw him.
[A peg is] fixed [in his wall] and he weeps over [it bitterly.]’
‘[Did you see the man with two sons?]’ ‘I saw him.
[Seated on two bricks] he eats a bread-loaf.’

13. Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:180. See E. Meyers, “Secondary Burials in Palestine,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 33 (1970): 15–16.

14. B. B. Schmidt, “Memory as Immortality: Countering the Dreaded ‘Death after Death’ in Ancient Israelite Society,” in Avery-Peck and Neusner, *Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, 87–100; and Schmidt, “Afterlife Beliefs: Memory as Immortality,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 63 (2000): 236–39.

'[Did you see the man with three sons?]' 'I saw him.
 He drinks water [from the waterskin slung on the saddle.]'
 '[Did you see the man with four sons?]' 'I saw him.
 [Like a man with a donkey-]team his heart rejoices.'
 'Did you see [the man with five sons?]' 'I saw him.
 He enters the palace [with ease.]'
 'Did you see [the man with six sons?]' 'I saw him.
 [Like a ploughman his heart rejoices.]'
 '[Did you see the man with seven sons?]' 'I saw him.'
 [Among the junior deities he sits on a throne and listens to the proceedings.]¹⁵

The idea of the afterlife at work in this passage is associated directly with progeny. The dead continued to exist through their offspring, and the more children, the greater the possibility for a lasting legacy. The particular ideology expressed here relates to the care and feeding of the dead either at the family tomb or through other means, such as the Mesopotamian *kispu* ritual. While the ritual performance of the *kispu* specifically was not part of Judahite and Israelite culture,¹⁶ plenty of evidence, both literary and archaeological, indicates that feeding the dead was practiced in ancient Judah and early Judaism. The reasons for this custom will be explored in chapters 2 and 4; for now it is enough to note that the ideology behind this practice was not unlike that described to Gilgamesh. Name and progeny were generally desired attributes in the Hebrew Bible,¹⁷ and these ideals play important roles in a wider network of afterlife beliefs, even if the connections are not always obvious.

The ideal of an afterlife in the Hebrew Bible often lies unrecognized behind otherwise famous passages. In Gen 15, for example, Yahweh promises

15. Tablet XII: 102–16. Translation from A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:732–35.

16. The problems of reconstructing the *kispu* in the Levant are addressed in D. Pardee, "Marziḫu, Kispu, and the Ugaritic Funerary Cult: A Minimalist View," in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture: Essays Presented in Honour of Professor John C. L. Gibson*, ed. N. Wyatt, W. G. E. Watson, and J. B. Lloyd (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 273–87. Although the focus of the essay is Ugarit, it serves as a caution against reconstructing the Mesopotamian ritual in ancient Israel and Judah.

17. Although Qoheleth would eventually disagree that name and progeny were important. For the rejection of functional immortality in Ecclesiastes, along with the complicated history of this theme in the various editions of the Epic of Gilgamesh, see M. J. Suriano, "Kingship and *Carpe Diem*, between Gilgamesh and Qoheleth," *Vetus Testamentum* 67 (2017): 285–306.

the patriarch Abram (Abraham) land and progeny. This promise is founded upon a concept of the afterlife that emerges near the end of the divine vision when Yahweh tells the patriarch of its eventual fulfillment (Gen 15:15–16). These biblical verses, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, assure the patriarch a proper fate. This is most apparent in the mention of Abraham’s burial: “you shall be buried at a ripe old age” (תקבר בשיבה טובה). But the mention of burial also alludes to the powerful ideologies of death that played important roles in ancient Israel. The allusion to the afterlife begins in Gen 15:15a with the statement that Abram will join his ancestors peacefully (אל אבותיך בשלום תבוא). The words here are comparable with the Akkadian idiom for death, “go to [his/her] fate” (*ana šimtim ittalak*). This phrase is used in the Code of Hammurabi to signify death by natural causes.¹⁸ A proper fate is the end of a fulfilled life, when one is allowed to meet one’s divine destiny. The specific nuance of the word for “fate/destiny” (*šimtu*) here is particular to Babylonian culture.¹⁹ But the idiom offers a useful analogy to the phrase in Gen 15:15a, not only in their similar meanings but also in their contrasting details. Like the Akkadian idiom, the biblical phrase “going to one’s fathers in peace” in verse 15a signifies divine fulfillment. The ideology of a good death (versus a bad death) underscores the accomplishment of this destiny, which is realized through a long life and eventual burial.

One could argue that the promise of land given to the patriarch is unfulfilled until the Israelites (his descendants) actually inherit it. These events, described later in the biblical narrative, occur well after Abraham’s days have come to an end. But this important distinction from the Akkadian idiom offers insight into how the biblical writers perceived the afterlife. G. R. Driver compared the Akkadian “go to one’s fate,” specifically its use in the Code of Hammurabi, with the death idiom used in the epilogues to the accounts of each king’s reign in the books of Kings.²⁰ He concluded that the Hebrew idiom “lie down with [one’s] fathers,” like the Akkadian phrase, signified a natural death. The problem is that the phrase’s usage in biblical literature is inconsistent with Driver’s

18. G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, Ancient Codes and Laws of the Near East 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 98. In addition to the Code of Hammurabi (CH), the phrase also occurs in the Laws of Eshnunna (LE). See LE §§ 17–18 and CH §§ 12, 162–163, and 167 found in M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. Writings from the Ancient World 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 61, 84, 112–113.

19. CAD Š III, *šimtu*³, 16–18. The classic discussion of fate and destiny (*šīamu*) in Akkadian literature is A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, ed. E. Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 200–206.

20. G. R. Driver, “Plurima Mortis Imago,” in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham Neuman*, ed. M. Ben-Horin, B. D. Weinryb, and S. Zeitlin (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 139–41.

interpretation.²¹ “To lie down with [one’s] fathers” should be understood as a formulaic idiom in Kings for dynastic succession. The interpretation is important here because Gen 15:15a evokes the same term for ancestors used in Kings: the “fathers” (אבות). Abraham does not go to some reified fate; he goes to his ancestors. Divine promise is not realized through some abstract concept of destiny that was based upon cosmological myths. The patriarch’s providence is founded upon a divine covenant, and this ultimate destiny involves not only him but also his posterity. Abraham’s destiny is fulfilled eventually because he lives a long life, is properly buried, and has progeny. Each of these elements is found in Gen 25:7–11, the account of his interment in the family tomb—the Cave of Machpelah.

In Gen 15:15–16, the outline and structure of his destiny is significant because Abraham’s positive fate is prefaced by him joining his fathers (v. 15a) and concludes with reference to his “fourth generation” (v. 16a). The similarities between Gen 15:15–16 and the epilogues in Kings extend beyond their common reference to the fathers. The structure of the epilogues follows the logical order of lineal descent.²² The dead king joins his ancestors, is buried in the royal tomb, and is followed by his son.²³ This order is present also in Gen 15:15–16, again in outline form: ancestors, burial, and progeny. In other words, death is idealized through themes of succession and inheritance. As such, death is relational, since Abraham’s fate is tied to that of his descendants. Genesis 15 shows that the afterlife is in many ways a transgenerational ideal.

The mention of progeny returning to the land (ודור רביעי ישובו הנה) is significant here considering the cultural importance of the third and fourth generation in Near Eastern and biblical texts. The concept of generations is an important component of describing an idealized fate.²⁴ The image of multiple

21. For a full discussion of Driver’s problematic interpretation and a defense of the succession-formula theory, see M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 35–36.

22. Suriano, *Politics*, 71–148.

23. Note that this same order is reflected in a series of Phoenician curses inscribed on Eshmunazor’s sarcophagus; see Suriano, *Politics*, 154–58. The order here, ancestors, burial, children, form an ideal in death. The intention of this curse was to deny this ordered ideal to anyone who violated the sanctity of Eshmunazor’s tomb.

24. The ability to see four generations of one’s progeny is considered a blessing, as is evident in biblical sources (Job 42:16) and in inscriptions such as the second Neirab stele (KAI 226:5). E.g., Joseph’s deathbed scene in Gen 50:22 states: “and Joseph saw sons of the third (generation) belonging to Ephraim, as well as the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh who were born at his knees.”

generations is polyvalent. It refers to the span of time, through natural succession, and touches upon the desire to be remembered. In this sense, one could say that Abraham has achieved functional immortality. But the generational depth should also be understood in light of the typical kinship unit in the ancient Levant,²⁵ which in the ancient sources is referred to by the term “house of the father” (בית אב). The divine promise to the patriarch’s fourth generation is countered by the threat of divine punishment to the third and fourth generations found in the Decalogue (Exod 20:5 and Deut 5:9; see also Num 14:18). The implication of this threat is the corporate accountability of every member of a household, and scholars have suggested that the third and fourth generations here refer to the extent of a joint family household.²⁶ But the fourth generation can also be idealized as a form of long-lasting blessing, as it is in Gen 15:16.

Like the joint family household, the house of the fathers, multiple generations of the dead could form a collective unit (“the fathers”) that stood for an idealized postmortem existence of ancestry. Hence the brief example in Gen 15:15–16 shows some of the ways ancestors formed a basis for afterlife beliefs in the Hebrew Bible. These beliefs underscored concepts of transgenerational blessings (as well as curses) enfolding the basic family unit in ancient Israel. The concept of death as relational thus offers several possibilities for analyzing the topic of death in the Old Testament. It can lead to new insight into ideologies of death evident in the treatment of the dead and result in different perspectives on postmortem existence inside the tomb. Biblical scholars such as Pedersen and Eichrodt acknowledged that the afterlife in the Old Testament was predicated upon the condition of the corpse. What they failed to appreciate was that this condition was dependent upon the living. The ritual actions that resulted in the burial of the dead were meaningful. The dead were mourned, but their burial was not entirely dreadful, nor were the actions of the living resigned toward death. These actions hardly indicate a rejection of death as, to use Pedersen’s words, “the enemy of life.”

25. L. E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 260 (1985): 18–25 and J. D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 147–55. See also A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, “The Four Room House: Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 26 and I. M. Diakonoff, “The Rural Community in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18 (1975): 131.

26. Schloen, *House*, 149, citing R. E. Clements, *Exodus*, Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 124.

Death was accepted as a natural part of life in the Hebrew Bible, and this acceptance is evident in how the dead were treated by the living. Yet it also meant that boundaries had to be maintained. Death was controlled through ritual, and the study of these funerary rituals allows us to incorporate a broader array of evidence.²⁷ The family tomb is an obvious component in an ideal death, but the meaning of this ideal is not as readily apparent. The archaeology of the Levant, particularly the study of the Judahite bench tomb, has the potential to clarify by offering an important view of the thresholds that separated the dead from the living. Yet this potential has been underutilized due to the challenges of multidisciplinary research, specifically the issues of how to integrate text and artifact. Bringing the various forms of evidence together under a single heuristic framework can help overcome these challenges and enable us to approach the subject of death in the Hebrew Bible within the social context of mortuary practices.

Theories of Mortuary Practice

Archaeologists have drawn from a wide range of materials to make observations regarding death in the Hebrew Bible, from the Neolithic period to the Bronze and Iron Ages.²⁸ This approach is valid insofar as the remains recovered from the ancient Levant constitute a broad cultural background for the biblical writers. It is necessary, however, to proceed with caution. Comparing cultural practices separated in time by thousands of years comes with the risk of making observations that are overly general and fraught with difficulties. But this approach is helpful at least in identifying particular practices that continued into the first millennium and even later. Here I am referring specifically to the reburial of the dead, or secondary burial practices, which occurred in various forms in the ancient Levant. During the first millennium BCE these practices take on a distinctive shape, first in Judah during the Iron Age II period, and then later in Second Temple Judaism.²⁹ Part I of this book will focus on the Iron II period because the remains of mortuary practices

27. See the definition of funerary rituals in N. Laneri, "An Archaeology of Funerary Rituals," in *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. N. Laneri (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2007), 2–3.

28. See for example Meyers, "Secondary Burials," 2–29.

29. A useful, though dated, history can be found in L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (1981): 171–77 and Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Four," *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 109–19.

from Judah constitute a rich source of data relevant for the study of death in the Hebrew Bible.³⁰

When developing an explanatory model, it is necessary to take into consideration the limits of interpretation so as to avoid problems such as straining the evidence, or crafting a hypothesis that is overreaching in its scope. As noted by L. Y. Rahmani in the first installment of his four-part study of Jewish burial customs,³¹ these limits include cultural and temporal distance, both of which separate the interpreter from the subject of inquiry. The interpreter of past cultures must operate with a healthy sense of self-awareness and recognize the limitations involved when we lack access to living informants. In addition to the interpreter's own cultural biases, the interpreter must also account for and acknowledge the plurality of explanations that often accompanied certain practices. All of these concerns can be addressed methodically, if done properly. Although the term *mortuary practice* will be used throughout this work, *funerary ritual* will be used at times to distinguish interment from other actions that relate to the dead but do not necessarily involve the dead body or the disposal of mortal remains.³² It is important, methodologically, to use precise terminology in establishing a cogent explanatory model. But before any explanation can be offered we must first address the social dimension of mortuary practices, as well as the ritual role of the corpse.

From an Idealist to a Representationist Approach

The social framework of burial became a major focal point in archaeological research in the 1970s when the approach was popularized in structuralist and processualist studies. This approach continued to be a topic of debate in post-processual archaeology, beginning in the late 1970s. But the intellectual history of this research reaches back to the nineteenth century and begins with the work of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges. In his 1864 book *La Cité antique* (*The Ancient City*),³³ Fustel de Coulanges sought to trace the foundations of

30. Although I will not discuss (at least not directly) the complicated question of when biblical literature was produced, it is important to note that the culture of Iron Age II Judah is reflected in this literature regardless of whether or not the texts are early or late.

31. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," 172.

32. This applies also to the more problematic phenomena of ancestor worship and the cult of the dead. Mourning customs also were separate from burial practices, although there could be considerable overlap.

33. N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956).

Greco-Roman. He placed a certain emphasis upon the tomb by suggesting that the “institutions” that gave rise to the ancient city originated in burial practices and asserted that the dead in early cultures endured a “second existence” inside the tomb: “in this second existence, the soul remained associated with the body; born together, they were not separated by death, and were buried together in the grave.”³⁴ The rituals involved in disposing of the dead, that is, removing their bodies to a secured place (the tomb), and the subsequent supply and provision within this place (feeding the dead), constituted the fundamental elements of religion. The privileged dead inside the family tomb were identified as ancestors. As such, they were both feared and revered, becoming deities to be worshiped by their living kin in a domestically centered cult. Through this line of interpretation, Fustel de Coulanges was able to place the origin of religion in the worship of ancestors.

The exclusive nature of the family tomb and the bonds of ancestor worship combined to form boundaries of control for kinship groups, effectively creating the basis for property rights: “The family appropriated to itself this soil by placing its dead here; it was established here for all time. . . . The soil where the dead rested was inalienable and imprescriptible.”³⁵ The ideas of Fustel de Coulanges concerning the dead made an early and somewhat problematic impact on scholarship. This is most notable in the work of James Frazer, who was interested in understanding the concepts of religion that, he felt, were evident in attitudes toward the dead.³⁶ But the legacy of Fustel de Coulanges is also apparent in later works such as Jack Goody’s *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962),³⁷ which examined the association between inheritance and the dead. Goody’s research and similar anthropological studies served as a precursor for a major trend in archaeology that began in the late 1960s: socially contextualized mortuary analysis.

The impetus to study the social dimensions of burial was a series of articles collected in a 1971 monograph edited by James Brown.³⁸ Lewis Binford began

34. Fustel de Coulanges, *Ancient City*, 16.

35. Fustel de Coulanges, *Ancient City*, 65.

36. G. Frazer, *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead*, Gifford Lectures, 1911–12, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1913) and Frazer, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, Literature of Death and Dying (New York: Arno, 1977).

37. J. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Lodagaa of West Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

38. J. A. Brown, ed., *Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*, Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology 25 (Washington, DC: Society for American Archaeology, 1971). For a useful overview, see J. Chapman, “Death, Society and Archaeology: The Social

the collection by rejecting what he called the “rationalist-idealist” approach to burial.³⁹ Here Binford cited Frazer and the nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward B. Tylor as examples of scholars who examined burial customs in order to reconstruct aspects of religious thought. According to these scholars, past cultures would use religion to explain the natural world. In other words, cultural practice was ideational.⁴⁰ For Tylor, death involved a body-soul dichotomy that was conceived by early cultures in dreams and hence identified with the dead, giving rise to a belief in deified spirits. For Frazer, fear of the dead provoked early cultures to create discrete places for their disposal (hence, the tomb) lest the dead plague the living in their new state. Inside the tomb, these problematic spirits could be placated through offerings of food and other goods. For Tylor and Frazer, the recognition of ancestor worship in ancient burial customs provided insight into an evolutionary stage of human culture where the animism of so-called primitive peoples gave way to religion and then, ultimately, rational thought.

In place of the rationalist-idealist approach, Binford called for one that examined the relationship between mortuary practices and the structure of the society that practices them.⁴¹ Binford’s interest in correlating social status with funerary remains became known as the *representationist* approach.⁴² It was based upon his close reading of anthropological theory, which highlighted the importance of ethnography. A notable example, built upon the

Dimensions of Mortuary Practices,” *Mortality* 8 (2003): 306–12. The surveys in this chapter and in Chapman’s essay are focused upon the essays of Lewis Binford and Arthur Saxe. But special mention should also be made of the important study of New England funerary monuments by J. Deetz and E. N. Dethlefsen, “Some Social Aspects of New England Colonial Mortuary Art,” in Brown, *Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*, 30–38.

39. L. R. Binford, “Mortuary Practices: Their Study and Their Potential,” in Brown, *Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*, 6–7. The second aspect of Binford’s study, his critique of ethnographic studies and specifically their diffusionary tendencies and theories of cultural derivation, is of lower significance for understanding the archaeology of death in the Levant. In some ways, the discussion of ethnography and its limits in understanding mortuary practices was already anticipated in the seminal article by P. Ucko, “Ethnography and the Archaeological Interpretation of Funerary Remains,” *World Archaeology* 1 (1969): 262–80.

40. Binford, “Mortuary Practices,” 6.

41. This approach emphasized modes of subsistence in particular. Although the discussion in this chapter will look at social structure, the economic implications of Binford’s theory have opened up new possibilities in mortuary analysis; see J. Brown, “On Mortuary Analysis—with Special Reference to the Saxe-Binford Research Program,” in *Regional Approaches to Mortuary Analysis*, ed. L. A. Beck (New York: Plenum, 1995), 4–12.

42. Brown, “On Mortuary Analysis,” 20; J. A. Brown, “Mortuary Practices for the Third Millennium: 1966–2006,” in Laneri, *Performing Death*, 303–4.

tangible results of archaeological fieldwork, is found in an essay by Arthur Saxe published in the same volume.⁴³ Saxe's essay was based on his dissertation, and in this work he formulated a series of correlates for the interpretation of social groups within mortuary remains. Specifically, his Hypothesis 8 is important because it associated the creation of exclusive burial sites (i.e., cemeteries) with the control of resources through lineal descent.⁴⁴ Although his interest was not in ancestors, Saxe's theory articulated some of the ways by which ancestral authority could be constructed through mortuary practices.

Saxe's Hypothesis 8 is an important milestone in scholarship on mortuary practices, particularly given how it was assessed and subsequently reappraised.⁴⁵ Although the general approach that adopts Hypothesis 8 is sometimes referred to as Saxe-Binford, Ian Morris calls it the Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis, acknowledging Lynn Goldstein's important revision of it.⁴⁶ So qualified, the Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis does not require that mortuary practices should always indicate inheritance. All aspects of ritual performance that reveal any interaction between the living beneficiary and the defunct benefactor must be taken into account before positing a causal relationship between ancestors and inheritance. Here Morris distinguishes ancestor worship from mortuary practices and cautions that "bounded cemeteries" (that is, exclusive places for disposing of the dead) do not necessarily imply a material relationship between the dead and the transfer of property. Likewise, claims of ancestral legitimacy do not always assume elaborate funerary rituals. In other words, ancestor worship is not essentially tied to the physical remains of the

43. A. Saxe, "Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices in a Mesolithic Population from Wadi Halfa, Sudan," in Brown, *Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*, 39–57.

44. Saxe's essay and his dissertation, "Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1970), were based in part on his excavation of a Mesolithic cemetery in the Wadi Halfa, Sudan. For the most part, however, Saxe's correlates relied heavily upon ethnographic analysis. See also Brown, "On Mortuary Analysis," 13–15 and I. Morris, "The Archaeology of Ancestors: The Saxe/Goldstein Hypothesis Revisited," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 1 (1991): 147–48.

45. Morris, "Archaeology of Ancestors," 146–149 and C. Carr, "Mortuary Practices: Their Social, Philosophical-Religious, Circumstantial, and Physical Determinants," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 2 (1995): 105–200.

46. Morris, "Archaeology of Ancestors," 146–49. Morris cites L. Goldstein, "Spatial Structure and Social Organization: Regional Manifestations of Mississippian Society" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1976), along with Goldstein, "One-dimensional Archaeology and Multi-dimensional People: Spatial Organisation and Mortuary Analysis," in *The Archaeology of Death*, ed. R. Chapman, I. Kinnes, and K. Randsborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 53–69.

dead, nor is it always evident in their disposal. Furthermore, ancestor worship is not necessarily related to concepts of patrilineal inheritance. But in cultures that have both bounded cemeteries and patrilineal genealogies—and hence ancestors—the two may be interrelated.

Morris was primarily concerned with avoiding universalizing explanations, so he stressed that Hypothesis 8 needed to be adapted to the socio-historical specifics of the given culture. His discussion of the Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis was also important because it made clear that in many cultures the concept of inheritance from ancestors was not the same as, or even related to, the worship of ancestors. The representationist approach offered new ways to understand the complex relationship between the construction of tombs and the identification of ancestors. But representationism was not without its own limitations, as Morris's qualifications of the Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis indicate. These theories were part of a larger movement in archaeology: processual archaeology, which was often dependent upon ideas of cultural evolution. This is remarkable considering that Binford and others were reacting against the evolutionary schema of earlier intellectualists such as Frazer. Instead of understanding rational thought to have emerged from the primordial waters of archaic belief systems,⁴⁷ processualists relied upon objective principles based upon empirical data, and focused on corporate entities rather than individuals.⁴⁸ Focusing on collective forms of society led processualists to over-emphasize rank and status in the analysis of mortuary remains. In the words of Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, "collective representations are, after all, as difficult to excavate as beliefs."⁴⁹ Despite this interest in corporate groups, the nature and concept of social collectivities were loosely described or incompletely defined.

A direct consequence of this loose treatment of social collectivities was a vaguely defined concept of ancestors. The works of processualists such as Binford and Saxe were clearly indebted to Fustel de Coulanges, particularly in drawing connections between mortuary practices and property rights,

47. See, e.g., the discussion of Frazer and Edward Tylor's interest in reconstructing ancient ideologies and belief systems in Binford, "Mortuary Practices," 6–7.

48. Binford not only was interested in systematizing ethonographic studies but also quantified cultural practices according to the Human Relations Areas File; note the tabulated data in Binford, "Mortuary Practices," 18–20. Again, this approach is clearly reflected in Saxe's creation of eight predictors of mortuary practices, based on his analysis of different ethonographic studies.

49. P. Metcalf and R. Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15.

although neither cites him.⁵⁰ But if processualists were influenced by the first part of Fustel de Coulanges's theory, they showed little interest in the second part of his theory, which involved the development of religious practices around the deified dead—namely, ancestor worship. The Saxe-Binford program was concerned with reconstructing social structure rather than religious practice. In fact it was Emile Durkheim, Fustel de Coulanges's student,⁵¹ who had a bigger impact on the Saxe-Binford program. Durkheim saw religion as a social construct,⁵² and he was interested in the social impact of death. Another influence was the work of Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith, whom Binford cites as an early opponent of the rationalist-idealist approach.⁵³ Smith advocated ritual and practice as the means of understanding past cultures, and Binford recognized this as an important foundation for Durkheim and his students. But neither Smith nor Durkheim offered any clarity on what constituted an ancestor.

Smith's theory was concerned with rituals of sacrifice as a form of communal activity, rather than ancestor worship as a type of belief.⁵⁴ His purpose was to counter theories that saw sacrifice strictly as a dedication to a deity. Durkheim, for his part, conflated ancestor worship with the cult of the dead, and he only loosely defined the latter.⁵⁵ In other words, Fustel de Coulanges's

50. According to Morris, "Archaeology of Ancestors," 150–51, Saxe's work reflects the impact of Fustel de Coulanges along with H. S. Maine, another nineteenth-century scholar who tied inheritance practices to religious beliefs.

51. Morris, "Archaeology of Ancestors," 150, recognizes Durkheim as the mediator between these early theories because he rearticulated the emphasis in Fustel de Coulanges from family tomb to cemeteries maintained by lineage groups. Morris took issue with the identification of ecological factors in the cultural mediation of ancestors and inheritance, although the problem has little bearing on this chapter.

52. É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. C. Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). To quote Goody, *Death*, 25: "despite the remarkable analysis made by his teacher Fustel de Coulanges of the relationship between lineage structure and ancestor worship and its relevance to the wider problem of the connection between social groups and ritual institutions, Durkheim followed the prevailing trend and relegated ancestor worship to a less important place in the study of religion than it had for earlier writers."

53. Binford, "Mortuary Practices," 7.

54. Although Smith's major work *The Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions*, Meridian Library (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), originally published in 1889, did not focus on the dead, or burial for that matter, it did postulate that sacrificial animals served as totemic ancestors for kinship groups. To be sure, Smith's work on ritual influenced Frazer and led to the Frazer's "myth and ritual" school.

55. As Goody, *Death*, 17–18, notes, Durkheim did not distinguish between mortuary practices and other rituals related to the dead.

concept of worshipping the deified dead hardly factored into the work of Durkheim, or of Smith before him. Rather than placing the origins of religion in the ideas of a culture—and specifically belief—Durkheim and Smith sought to understand religion as practice and to place this practice within the context of society. In fact, Durkheim followed Smith's line and sought early religious practice in totemism rather than in burial practices. For Smith, the importance lay in the ability of ritual to create social bonds, while Durkheim expanded these ideas in his effort to theorize the formation of society and community. Archaeologists, exemplified in the work of Binford, Saxe, and Brown, followed Durkheim while focusing their principal research questions on the social role of burial. Smith provided a foundation for their work, which took ritual as a form of cultural practice that held important social functions. With this primary emphasis on society, concepts of religion became bracketed by social concerns. In general, processual archaeologists avoided the problematic aspects of ancestor worship, as first conceived by Fustel de Coulanges, but the definition of *ancestor* was left vague. Mortuary practices were often described as the "cult of the dead" without further explanation.⁵⁶

With its basis in Fustel de Coulanges and Durkheim, the archaeological focus on the social dimensions of mortuary practices offered greater potential for answering economic and demographic questions. It is no surprise that the discussion and debates that followed were focused on these issues.⁵⁷ The post-processual response dispensed with processualism's positivistic implications by stressing the role of interpretation and drew attention back to the individual. Ian Hodder's classic interpretation of prehistoric megaliths as reflections of the household serves as a prime example of postprocessual attention to the symbolic nature of material remains.⁵⁸ Postprocessualist interpretations such

56. See the comment by Morris, "Archaeology of Ancestors," 150. In this sense, archaeologists (processualists) were similar to Durkheim, although Durkheim had a much more developed concept of what constituted cult.

57. Most notably, the problem with using grave goods to assign rank; see M. Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*, Texas A & M University Anthropology Series 3 (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2002). This point was already raised by Ucko, "Ethnography," 262–80.

58. See I. Hodder, "Burials, Houses, Women and Men in the European Neolithic," in *Ideology, Power, and Prehistory*, ed. D. Miller and C. Y. Tilley, New Directions in Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). In other words, archaeologists should rely upon explanations that work within local manifestations of cultural practices rather than global expectations based upon ethnographies. For similar cautionary statements, following a brief review of Saxe-Binford, see L. Singer-Avitz, "The Middle Bronze Age Cemetery," in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, ed. D. Ussishkin (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004), 1006–7.

as Hodder's can, in fact, be used to complement the general assumptions of the Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis. For example, the symbolic importance of family and household could factor into mortuary practices among cultures that associated inheritance with ancestral lines.

In cultures that defined patrimony and collective identity around the symbol of the household, one can expect to find lineal forms of inheritance tied to well-defined systems of ancestors. This is clearly the case in Judah and in the Hebrew Bible,⁵⁹ so it is possible to connect traditions of patrimony in biblical literature with Judahite mortuary practices. Furthermore, the debates between processualism and postprocessualism show the value in studying both collective and individual forms of identity rather than privileging one over the other. In chapter 1 of this book, I will carefully examine the mediation of the individual and the collective through Judahite funerary rituals. In chapter 2, I will trace the history of the Judahite bench tomb in order to enable an understanding of its broader cultural implications. Although the main focus in these chapters will be the tomb and its ritual space, the discussion will have implications for the treatment of the body. How the body itself is understood will set the stage for the chapters in part II.

Ritual and the Body

"The archaeological remains of the body are the culmination of rites of passage which serve to separate the dead from the living and install them within another dimension of human understanding."⁶⁰ This statement by Mike Parker Pearson, an archaeologist often associated with postprocessualist interpretation, sums up the working assumptions related to the body in mortuary practices and raises several important issues regarding ritual. For one, how does the body relate to ritual? Asking this question allows us to look beyond the biological remains discovered inside tombs and examine the cultural meanings that were assigned to them. The issue then becomes one of defining *ritual*. Parker Pearson's quote specifically states *rites of passage*, which implies actions that are intended to facilitate the transition of the individual from the living to the dead. Thus funerary rituals involve an obvious dichotomy, and this aspect can be addressed through Catherine Bell's concept

59. Of course, biblical scholars differ regarding the details. See T. J. Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate (נחלת אבות) in 2 Samuel 14:16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 597–612 and F. Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 473 (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 1–28.

60. Quote from Parker Pearson, *Archaeology of Death and Burial*, 71.

of *ritualization*. According to Bell, ritualization is the interrelationship of action and meaning within a specific setting.⁶¹ Each influences the other, and although Bell's major emphasis was on action, her analysis of how meaning was generated through privileged oppositions can be compared with Parker Pearson's description of mortuary remains. The understanding of ritual (or ritualization) as something created through systems of binary oppositions works particularly well with mortuary practices since they are founded upon a basic opposition: death and life.

Bell's work showed how a series of oppositions could be instilled within—or inscribed upon, to use Michel Foucault's terminology—the body. Within the locus of the body it is also possible to recognize various systems of oppositions, such as pure and impure, that played part in rituals associated with death. The implicit understanding of such oppositions and the associations made with each binary schema created hierarchical relationships. Although Bell was more interested in ritual action as practice than in describing subjectivity, it is easy to recognize the outlines of Foucault's concept of power relations. In addition, as Bell pointed out, the groundwork for understanding ritual oppositions was laid by Durkheim in his separation of the sacred and the profane. Not surprisingly, it was the early twentieth-century work of Durkheim and his associates, Marcel Mauss and Robert Hertz (who was also Durkheim's student),⁶² that led scholars to recognize that bodies are as much social constructs as they are biologically determined objects.

Hertz's work on embodiment involved both living and dead bodies. As he studied living bodies, he carefully examined the binary opposition of the right hand versus the left.⁶³ The learned behavior of bodily practices directly connected to values ascribed to each hand that were organized hierarchically. In certain cultural contexts, the left hand can be considered evil while the right hand is good. Various meanings are embodied, and in this way they establish boundaries for social behavior.⁶⁴ Hertz's study showed how

61. Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74 and Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 136–37.

62. M. Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *Sociology and Psychology: Essays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), originally published in 1935. R. Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, trans. R. Needham and C. Needham (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960).

63. R. Hertz, "The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A study in Religious Polarity," in *Death and the Right Hand*, 89–113.

64. This is evident even in cases where the meaning of embodied actions has long since faded from memory, as in Western cultures where one does not extend one's left hand in social greetings.

the body was not strictly an organic object but also an object constructed through cultural forces and recognized through embodied actions. In a second essay,⁶⁵ Hertz extended his discussion of embodied meaning to corpses. His study of corpse treatment showed how the biological facts of the body can both influence and be affected by cultural attitudes of embodiment. The entry point for this discussion was what Hertz called “double burials,” otherwise referred to as primary and secondary burial practices. He focused on the corpse as a degenerating body,⁶⁶ and his work showed how the ritual practices surrounding corpses and bones revealed cultural responses to death that could be measured through the treatment of the body. The natural process of decay became his metaphor for the soul’s journey through the afterlife, and he suggested that the complete putrefaction of the corpse marked the finality of death.⁶⁷ Within a course of action that involved the body’s “wet” stage (as a corpse) and “dry” stage (as bones), Hertz was able to trace the means by which a society could establish new identities and readjust itself.⁶⁸

Hertz’s work on secondary burial rites compares with the well-known study of *rites de passage* by his contemporary Arnold van Gennep.⁶⁹ Van Gennep parsed lifecycle events into three phases: separation, liminality, and aggregation. Using this generalized schema, he analyzed a broad range of rituals such as weddings, initiation rites, and funerals. In each he was able to discern three stages, or phases, that occurred at important moments during the event. Each event also placed particular emphasis on one of the three phases, and van Gennep discovered that the emphasis in funerary rites was typically placed not on the final stage of aggregation but on the middle

65. Hertz’s life was cut short by World War I, so his work is limited to these two essays, which were written without accompanying fieldwork.

66. R. Hertz, “A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death,” in *Death and the Right Hand*, 29–86.

67. D. J. Davies, “Robert Hertz: The Social Triumph over Death,” *Mortality* 5 (2000): 97–102. As was typical of Durkheim’s students, Hertz analyzed society as an organic whole and saw the use of ritual as a means for society to confront death in order to ensure its own survival. R. Parkin, *The Dark Side of Humanity: The Work of Robert Hertz and Its Legacy* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996), 87–88. For Hertz, secondary burial customs served as a type of ritual locus for the development of his theory; note the comments in Hertz, “Contribution,” 56–57 and see Davies, “Robert Hertz,” 97–98.

68. Parker Pearson, *Archaeology of Death and Burial*, 50.

69. A. van Gennep, *Les Rites De Passage* (Paris: Nourry, 1909). The English translation, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) will be cited throughout.

phase: the rite of liminality.⁷⁰ Although he did not attend to the particulars of secondary burial, van Gennep's theory is comparable to Hertz's work because he described stages through which a ritual subject would pass. Van Gennep's work differed from Hertz's in that the body as an analytical focus remained largely unexplored.⁷¹ It is still possible, nonetheless, to recognize how the physicality of the body could be defined within spatial parameters through each of van Gennep's ritual stages.

The precipitating factors behind transition rituals are often biological changes in the body. These changes could be menstruation, puberty, pregnancy, birth, aging, and ultimately death. The various stages of passage could also involve physically marking bodies in ways that affect change, such as in shaving rituals and self-laceration. The point to be stressed here is that rituals interact with bodies on levels that are both symbolic and physical. With this caveat in mind, it is necessary to examine Victor Turner's work on transition rituals, which was based upon van Gennep's work on rites of passage.⁷² For Turner, all culturally defined symbolic systems derived from the physical experiences of the body.⁷³ This contention placed Turner at odds with Durkheim and, by extension, Mauss and Hertz. His purpose was not to refute the idea that bodies were symbolic constructs formed within social frameworks, nor was he interested in discovering the origins of cultural practices, as was Frazer. Instead, Turner sought to examine the role of bodily experiences within ritual processes.

Embodied experience was fundamentally relational in Turner's view. But it was also based upon binary oppositions that were ordered hierarchically, which in some ways is comparable to Bell's work. Turner's assumption underscored his work on marginality, which coincided with the middle stage of van Gennep's rites of passage. Turner emphasized this stage to the extent that it took on an autonomous sense distinct from the other stages.⁷⁴ The marginal

70. Van Gennep, *Rites*, 146. See also Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations*, 32–33.

71. For a critique of van Gennep from the perspective of anthropology, see J. S. La Fontaine, *Initiation, Themes in Social Anthropology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 24–35. See also J. Hockey, "The Importance of Being Intuitive: Arnold van Gennep's the Rites of Passage," *Mortality* 7 (2002): 216.

72. V. W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–95.

73. According to Turner, *Forest*, 90, "human biology demands certain intense experiences of relationship."

74. V. W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 1966 (New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 94–96 and Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations*, 32–33; see also Hockey, "Importance," 215–16.

phase became for Turner the most critical one in the ritual process because it was a temporary status endured by the subject. The ritual subject left a former status but had not yet assumed a new status. In Turner's words,⁷⁵ the subject was "betwixt and between"—that is, the subject's identity was tenuous. The marginalized identity, isolated from its community, exists in an unstable state. Turner referred to this state using van Gennep's term, *liminality*, which applies to the temporal aspects of the ritual. The concept of liminality can be compared with Hertz's description of the temporary status of the body before the performance of secondary burial. Turner's work also provided a corrective to earlier models in that it stressed agency in ritual action (the creation of social significance) as opposed to a solely protective function (the preservation of social order).⁷⁶ Rather than describing the effect of ritual on society as a whole, Turner was able to highlight the individual within the ritual process. Status was a state of being for Turner, hence he used the term "state" to describe the condition of the ritual subject. But his interest in the fluidity of status during the ritual process was effectively an interest in the construction of identity.

Turner's concept of the individual as a temporarily marginalized ritual actor draws to the forefront the issue of subjectivity. In some ways, it anticipates the problems found in theories of ritual practice where the self as a concept is often assumed. *Subjectivity* is a term most often associated with Foucault. Despite the fact that mortuary practices were not his interest, the concept of the body that emerges from Foucault's writings touches upon the topic in influential ways. Because Foucault's main interest was in power and subjectivity, and not the body per se,⁷⁷ the body was at times loosely defined in his work.⁷⁸ But it is readily apparent as the subject of power relations, an object inscribed with knowledge, or a point of ethical introspection through what he called *bodily techniques*.⁷⁹ Each aspect of the body is intricately formed

75. See Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," in *Forest of Symbols*, 93–111. See also Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94–130.

76. Hockey, "Importance," 215–16.

77. M. Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 82 stated that his objective was an "analytics of power." He described this as "a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis." See also Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1982): 777–95.

78. See D. Dudrick, "Foucault, Butler, and the Body," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2005): 228.

79. J. Protevi, "Body," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. L. Lawlor and J. Nale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 51–56.

through cultural modes of discourse that Foucault examined in his historical study of institutions, clinical and penal, as well as his multivolume work on the history of sexuality.

According to anthropologist Lynn Meskell, Foucault's focus on the body as a site of knowledge and power led him to define it almost exclusively through social relations. The body, by this definition, is a passive entity.⁸⁰ The wider issue Meskell confronts is one to which postprocessual archaeologists are particularly sensitive: prioritizing the collective over the individual, the society over the self.⁸¹ This is seen acutely in the reification of society, which then creates an exclusive framework for understanding the self.⁸² According to Meskell, the body becomes simply an "artifact" of larger structural entities. Her concept of selfhood, as reclaimed in the archaeological remains, becomes apparent in her rejection of van Gennep's model of rites of passage. In its place, she proposes a *lifecycles* model that emphasizes the individual in a holistic manner. A person's narratives become important, and a person's identity is placed within the expanded setting of a person's lived experience rather than specific ritual practices.

Meskell's lifecycles, along with her critique of embodiment, echoes trends in religious studies where the primary focus has shifted from belief systems to lived experience. Rather than study the societal forces that shape and mold bodies, the concept of subjectivity should be carefully nuanced (if not rearranged) to bring out the characteristics of the individual.⁸³ The relational attributes of the individual become apparent through the person's lived experiences or practice.⁸⁴ In Meskell's words, "time, identity, and cultural context are the interlaced frames through which we might apprehend the lifecycle."⁸⁵

80. The discussion here follows L. Meskell, "The Irresistible Body and the Seduction of Archaeology," in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, ed. D. Montserrat (London: Routledge, 1998), 148–51.

81. Meskell, "Irresistible Body," 139–61; Meskell, "Cycles of Life and Death: Narrative Homology and Archaeological Realities," *World Archaeology* 31 (2000): 423–41; and the comments in R. A. Joyce, "Archaeology of the Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 139–58.

82. Meskell, "Cycles," 431 is also critical of Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, particularly its assumption of a problematic division between modern and premodern.

83. C. Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012): 7–33 has taken up this general turn and called for studies that situate the body within a relational context.

84. Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity," 20–25.

85. Meskell, "Cycles," 425.

The personal narratives of the dead that emerge from Meskell's study of life-cycles are compelling, even though her theoretical model is developed specifically for the culture of ancient Egypt.⁸⁶ Her theory is not well suited for particular mortuary practices such as the Judahite bench tomb, where social status is not clearly marked or where communal burials may in fact suppress rank. Nonetheless, we can learn from Meskell's work how to emphasize the individual within overlapping boundaries. Not only does her lifecycles model resist starkly drawn ritual stages but also it demonstrates the importance of recognizing ritual variability at intersections of identity, such as gender or age. Finally, Meskell's critique of Foucault is founded in part upon the assumed dichotomy in his work of body versus mind, demarcated along Cartesian lines.⁸⁷

The challenge is one of dichotomies, which can be useful and at times even necessary when theorizing the body. According to Talal Asad, however, it is imperative to avoid reductive assumptions where every aspect of the topic involves dualities.⁸⁸ We should also avoid the assumption that all dialectical relationships should be characterized according to the same rationality. Asad confronts the tension in earlier theoretical works that explained bodily practices as either innate or constructed through enculturation.⁸⁹ Although he does not offer any resolution, Asad points to Mauss's 1935 essay "Techniques of the Body" as an important model for negotiating this tension.⁹⁰ He highlights Mauss's notion of *habitus* as "an assemblage of embodied aptitudes not as systems of symbolic meanings."⁹¹ This concept sidesteps the problems

86. Meskell, "Cycles," 425 states: "in Egypt it appears that the concept of the lifecycle is a more accurate template for life experience rather than the mode of *rites de passage* with its specific European lineage and intellectual baggage." The latter, "intellectual baggage," refers to the now outdated concepts of ancient Egypt that influenced van Gennepe.

87. Paraphrasing Foucault, Dudrick, "Foucault," 228 (italics his) states: "Foucault holds that *bodies 'directly involved in a political field'—that is, souls—themselves* are constituted within the specific nexus of culture or discourse/power regimes." To be fair, Foucault was documenting changes in Western culture that embrace a body-mind dichotomy. Note, e.g., his discussion of the changes in Roman Catholic confessionals in Foucault, *Introduction*. 19–20, 59–65.

88. T. Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. S. Coakley, Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45 n. 7.

89. Asad, "Remarks," 43–45.

90. Mauss, "Techniques."

91. Asad, "Remarks," 47.

inherent in the symbolic study of the body, with its emphasis on representation. In some ways, Asad's furtive attempt to negotiate ideas of the body as symbol or as physical reality complements Meskell's criticism of symbolic representations of the body that privilege the collective over the individual. The dichotomies are unavoidable, but scholars should neither emphasize sharp divisions nor prioritize their separate properties.⁹²

Meskell also interacts with a concept of *habitus*, although it is not Mauss's work from which she draws. Instead, she takes up Pierre Bourdieu's better known definition.⁹³ Although Meskell sees Bourdieu's work as limited by its tendency to confine individual bodies within larger unifying social structures, she draws from his primary notion of the body: "Bourdieu . . . dislocates the body from bearer of symbolic value to the body as material phenomenon which both constitutes, and is constituted by society."⁹⁴ The body reflects society through multiple means: agency and patterns of behavior, the individual's position in society, and the construction of the individual's *habitus*. Accordingly, following Bourdieu, Meskell understands *habitus* to represent the social and cultural frameworks that inculcate an individual's worldview. In comparison, Mauss's *habitus* was concerned primarily with the identification of physical practices that were learned. He was less interested in such behavior as symbolically imbued with cultural meaning; his *habitus* identified the cultural structures that contextualize bodily practices through ideas of acceptable behavior and notions of social standards.⁹⁵ Although one might find fault with the role of the individual here, it is still possible to recognize a level of individual agency within Mauss's understanding of practice that allows us to account for both physical and social aspects of the body.

The treatment of bodies as both physical and social objects must be weighed against the available evidence and adjusted according to the particular features of the given culture, especially when one is analyzing burial remains. Although bodily practices were often the product of ongoing and complicated processes of enculturation, the final treatment of the corpse during funerary rituals can reveal key aspects of embodiment ideals. Concepts

92. Theories that take the body as metaphor for society should be approached with caution and used with much qualification. In fact Asad, "Remarks," 44 and to an extent Meskell, "Irresistible Body," 151 are critical of Mary Douglas in this regard.

93. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–95.

94. Meskell, "Irresistible Body," 151–52, citing C. Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, Theory, Culture & Society (London: Sage, 1993), 73–74 and Bourdieu, *Outline*, 85.

95. Asad, "Remarks," 47.

of the body framed and bracketed cultural expectations of what constituted proper fates and successful lives.⁹⁶ John Robb has shown that the cultural process includes narratives societies used to assign meaning to human experience.⁹⁷ What is a good death? How does this ideal shape a culture's response to mortality? How does it influence the physical treatment of bodies during the act of burial? Regarding burial, Robb points out that archaeologists need to be attentive not only to variable practices related to disposing of the dead but also to the cultural implications of disposal.⁹⁸ Such practices relate to concepts of death (good versus bad) and life (fulfilled versus unfulfilled). But they also operate within larger social and ethical parameters. All of these issues tie into narrative—or biography, to use Meskell's term—and each is addressed in this book. Chapter 1 looks at the transition of the dead through the ritual space of the Judahite bench tomb. In chapter 4 the cultural discourse of death is examined closely through the concept of the self and practices involved in care for the dead. Chapters 5 and 6 will explore the different ways that narratives of the dead were inscribed on their bodies and expressed through stories of burial or nonburial. Finally, chapter 7 examines the problem of marginality that is created through the transition of the dead, focusing on the ambiguity of the term *Sheol*.

The cultural meaning assigned to the dead body and encoded in its treatment inside the ritual space of the tomb cannot be understood without knowledge of the archaeology of Judahite mortuary practices, and it is here that this book will begin. The archaeological analysis will then lead to a nuanced reading of various biblical narratives of the dead that is sensitive to the cultural importance of corpses and bones. To quote Robb:

If, as social theorists contend, the body is a key site within which the self is realized, arguably, it is precisely toward the period of its deterioration and disposal that we should train our eye. For example, it is then that the self as constituted across time begins a radical process of transformation. Diachronically unfolding biographies collapse and condense in parting reconciliations, eulogies, reminiscence, graveside relationships and gatherings and subsequent dispersal of anecdotes,

96. To put it in terms of *habitus* (drawing from both Mauss and Bourdieu), embodied practices informed how individuals understood their role in the cosmos, in both life and death.

97. J. Robb, "Burial Treatment as Transformations of Bodily Ideology," in Laneri, *Performing Death*, 288.

98. Robb, "Burial Treatment," 288–89.

clothing and memorabilia. Holistically and synchronically, fragments of personal identity may be gathered, sifted and recast.⁹⁹

As a physical artifact, the dead body can be seen as a passive subject of cultural practices that were performed by the living. But the dead body is also an object of social meaning that actively frames its care and treatment. Thus it becomes possible to use mortuary practices to identify constellations of meaning construed along oppositional lines, beginning with the living and the dead and encompassing other forms such as pure-impure (contaminating), whole-broken, and individual-collective. The ritualized forms of differentiation can take on hierarchical associations, as Bell argued, yet the conception of the body should not be understood exclusively in terms of power relations, as Foucault did, but defined relationally, following Turner. In this way, it is possible to understand the corpse through means that allow the dead to speak for themselves.

Understanding Ancestors

If we are to allow the dead to speak for themselves it is important to establish an understanding of what it means to be an *ancestor*. This is important because biblical scholars and archaeologists alike often use the term without clearly defining it. Certainly, ancestors can appear as prominent fixtures in a culture's perspective on the past, and Abraham is an excellent example.¹⁰⁰ But the prominence of ancestors such as Abraham can also obscure our understanding of the term. We know who the ancestors were. We just struggle with how to define them. In biblical studies it is almost easier to establish who (or what) was *not* an ancestor than to describe their qualifications. Everyone dies—this is a truism—but not every dead person qualifies as an ancestor. So how should we understand this concept in the Hebrew Bible?

The terminology for ancestor in biblical literature corresponds for the most part with categories of kinship. A principal word is “father,” seen in the term for the basic Israelite family unit, the “house of the father.” In this case, the father is the eponymous founder of the kinship group. The term, however, typically occurs in the plural form to convey the idea of a collective category of the dead. These are the “fathers” to whom Abraham goes in Gen 15:15, as well

99. E. Hallam, J. L. Hockey, and G. Howarth, *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 5.

100. R. S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

as the ancestors who are referenced in the epilogues for dead kings (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:51). In fact, the phrase used for the death of a patriarch in Genesis, “he was gathered to his peoples” (e.g., Gen 25:8), is synonymous with “he lay down with his fathers” in Kings, where joining the royal ancestors is reserved exclusively for rulers who are succeeded by their sons.¹⁰¹ Although Genesis places importance on the burials of the matriarchs Sarah and Rachel (discussed in chapter 6) and emphasizes the treatment of Joseph’s dead body (discussed in chapter 5), only the patriarchs buried in the Cave of Machpelah are gathered to their peoples. This creates a clear lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob connecting the inheritance of Israel’s great ancestors with a family tomb (see Gen 49:29–32). Descent is defined for both kings and patriarchs by a filial relationship of father to son. The inheritance that is passed down through his patrilineal system, whether it is land or office (kingship), constitutes patrimony.

The expressions in Genesis and Kings both involve a clear link between systems of inheritance and bounded cemeteries, whether they were royal tombs or family burial sites. The link provided by biblical tradition thus fulfills one of the basic precepts of Morris’s Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis. There is an established cultural context for death and inheritance, and mortuary practices can be understood as one component within the wider array of this context (although it played a significant role).¹⁰² Scholars have often related the death idioms in Genesis and Kings with mortuary practices in the southern Levant.¹⁰³ The use of verbs that can relate to burial—“gather” (אסף) and “lie down” (שכב)—combined with collective terms for the dead—“peoples” (עמים) and “fathers” (אבות)—is compared with the phenomenon of communal burial sites.¹⁰⁴ The comparison is most applicable to the Judahite bench tomb of the Iron Age II period, where the collective remains of the dead would be amassed inside repositories. An important aspect of death ideology evident not only in local mortuary practices but also in biblical traditions can thus be summarily described as reunion with dead kin inside a communal, or family, tomb.

Reunion with one’s ancestors exemplifies an important way that death was relational in the Hebrew Bible. One’s postmortem status could be dependent

101. Suriano, *Politics*, 71–97.

102. Morris, “Archaeology of Ancestors,” 149.

103. While this interpretation is found in mid-twentieth-century scholarship such as Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:213 and J. Callaway, “Burials in Ancient Palestine: From the Stone Age to Abraham,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 26 (1963), 75, it was also rejected during this period by others, such as Driver, “Plurima Mortis Imago,” 141. The contribution of archaeology gradually shifted this trend; see the history of scholarship in Suriano, *Politics*, 34–40.

104. Suriano, *Politics*, 38–40.

upon who buried one, where one was buried, and whom one joined in death. Ideally, this meant being buried inside one's family tomb. The observation runs the risk of obsessing over collectives. But it offers a productive means of moving forward without necessarily excluding the role of the individual dead in mortuary practices. The dead were often remembered by name in biblical traditions. Likewise, the burial of the dead and their provision inside the tomb were actions that were initially focused on the individual. The collective dead inside the bench tomb was the product and outcome of secondary burials, a process repeated over time in which single burials were eventually transferred from a bench to a repository. In an ideal situation, the dead individually entered the tomb, where they could ultimately join the collective ancestry. Thus the transition of the individual, precipitated by death, was not the ascent of a soul. The idea of the afterlife at work here did not involve concepts of heaven or hell; it was an afterlife of ancestors. Postmortem existence was tied to the tomb, and it was collective, but the afterlife was not some Ur-grave. The collective ideal in death was embodied in the ancestors. As an assemblage of bones, the ancestors formed an achieved status that could be defined through ritual practices and assigned to burial sites.

The meaningful dead, for the biblical writers, were those who could be considered family. In the Hebrew Bible, the concept of ancestors was delineated along kinship lines. This is why the family tomb was so important. But the Hebrew Bible also mentions other types of the dead who were separate from family tombs and distinct from ancestors. Examples include the Rephaim, as well as the dead who were summoned through necromancy. If we understand who these dead were and what they stood for in biblical literature, we can gain some insight into the parameters of what it meant to be an ancestor.

The Rephaim and the necromantic dead offer a contrast with biblical ancestors, which is beneficial for improving our definition of the term. The fathers evoked in *Kings* represent an exclusive lineage of ancestors. They were the aggregate total of several generations of dead kings, and only the ruling dynasties of Israel and Judah were ascribed to this group. Yet these royal ancestors are still referred to using terms of kinship. As such, the fathers in *Kings* contrast with the Rephaim who appear as the dead elsewhere in biblical literature. While the Rephaim are not royal ancestors in the Hebrew Bible, they are in certain ancient Near Eastern sources. In Ugaritic inscriptions this group, called the *rapi'ūma*, are depicted as honored figures of a mythic past.¹⁰⁵

105. The Rephaim are featured prominently in Ugaritic literature and mentioned in the Phoenician sarcophagus inscription of Eshmunazar; see Suriano, *Politics*, 149–64 and B. R. Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel*, Ilex Foundation Series (Boston: Ilex Foundation and Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012).

In this role they could appear in royal lineages as ancestors of Ugarit's kings. One particular tablet, *KTU* 1.161, ritually invokes several dead kings, beginning with a series of individuals who are referred to as *rapi'u*.¹⁰⁶ In the Hebrew Bible, however, the Rephaim are depicted in a negative light. In Isaiah, they are powerless shades in the netherworld (Isa 14:9) who will never rise from the dead and instead are forgotten and rejected (Isa 26:14, 19). The Rephaim are not Israelite ancestors in the Hebrew Bible, nor are they ever claimed as forebears by any king of Judah or Israel. If anything, as characters vanquished in the past by Moses (Deut 3:11) and David (2 Sam 21:15–22; 1 Chr 20:6–8), the Rephaim appear as ancestors of Israel's enemies.¹⁰⁷

The biblical references to necromancy also provide examples of groups of the dead not to be confused with ancestors.¹⁰⁸ Necromancy is the act of contacting the dead through divination, and such practices certainly evince belief in postmortem existence. But necromancy is distinct from mortuary practices. It does not require a dead body, nor is it necessarily performed at a tomb. In the most famous account of necromancy in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 28), the performance of the ritual takes place at the specialist's home rather than at a cemetery. Furthermore, there was no kinship relation between the living and the dead in this story—Samuel was not Saul's ancestor. There is no reason, then, to conflate the necromantic dead with biblical concepts of ancestors. In fact, the terminology in the Hebrew Bible used to describe necromancy is distinct from descriptions of ancestors.

The Hebrew Bible contains a very specialized vocabulary for the dead in necromancy. In two instances, 1 Sam 28:13 and Isa 8:19, the divinized spirit is referred to enigmatically as a “deity/deities” (אלהים). While the term certainly offers a powerful image of the dead, it does not necessarily mean the the dead here are deified ancestors. Ancestor worship and necromancy were separate phenomena with different agendas. Necromancy was performed to gain privileged knowledge rather than to procure blessings. In another passage on necromancy, the dead are referred to as אֲשִׁים (Isa 19:3). This hapax legomenon in

106. M. Suriano, “Dynasty Building at Ugarit: The Ritual and Political Context of *KTU* 1.161,” *Aula Orientalis* 27 (2009): 18–19.

107. See M. S. Smith, “Recent Study of Israelite Religion in Light of the Ugaritic Texts,” in *Ugarit at Seventy-Five*, ed. K. L. Younger (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 19 and Suriano, *Politics*, 164.

108. The biblical discussion of necromancy, which is always hostile, is found in an array of literary forms. It is banned in the legislation of the Pentateuch (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 7; Deut 18:11), described in narrative accounts (1 Sam 28; 2 Kgs 21:6; 23:24), and critiqued in prophetic texts (Isa 8:19; 19:3).

biblical Hebrew is a loan word from Akkadian, *eṭemmu* ‘ghost’, that denotes a problematic type of dead spirit that required exorcism to be removed. Otherwise the terms that are typically used for the necromantic dead, almost always in tandem, are the “revenant dead and the familiar spirits” (אבות וידענים; e.g., Lev 19:31; 20:6; 2 Kgs 23:24). But the dead in necromancy are never identified as ancestors,¹⁰⁹ nor are they referenced using kinship terminology. This distinction is important because it shows that the biblical writers were careful not to mix necromancy—a practice they strongly opposed—with the veneration of ancestors.

The veneration of ancestors was important in Judah and Israel, but one should not confuse veneration with ancestor worship. In cultures where ancestors are deified and worshiped, the occurrence of such religious practices is often separate from the disposal of the dead.¹¹⁰ This practice also does not necessarily overlap with mantic interaction with the dead, or necromancy. Given these distinctions,¹¹¹ it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify ancestor worship in the Hebrew Bible (or ancient Judah), even though the conflation of funerary rituals and necromancy with ancestor worship has at times led biblical scholars to argue for its existence there.¹¹² The arguments for the existence of ancestor worship in the culture of the biblical writers is often based on the link between burial and lineal descent that is clearly attested in the sources.¹¹³ But, as stated above, lineal descent does not require a belief in the deified dead. Nevertheless, biblical scholars occasionally cite Fustel de Coulanges as

109. Aside from the unlikely etymological link between אב and אב, ‘father’.

110. Morris, “Archaeology of Ancestors,” 150.

111. That is, ancestor worship, funerary rituals, and necromancy were separate and distinct as cultural practices; see B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 4–12 and Pardee, “Marzihu,” 273–74.

112. The problem of ancestor worship in ancient Israel has a long and complicated history in scholarship. It will not be treated in full in this book, but I mention it here merely to indicate why I have chosen a different direction for my research. For the problems of ancestor worship, see Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*. See however T. J. Lewis, “How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead,” 186–207 and E. Bloch-Smith, “Death in the Life of Israel,” 140–42, in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. B. M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

113. An example is the important article by B. Halpern, “Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability,” in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. B. Halpern and D. W. Hobson (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991), 11–107. To be sure, the connection is not always made with burial, but it is often based on the important and powerful systems of lineage that are obvious in the sources; see Karel van der

the basis for their understanding of ancestor worship. But this basis leads to problematic evolutionary models of Israelite religion that are not unlike the origins of religion proposed by Tylor and Frazer.¹¹⁴

Theories of ancestor worship usually start with historical reconstructions of a Deuteronomistic reform, placed sometime in the late seventh century BCE and associated with Josiah.¹¹⁵ The religion of the state, and specifically that of Jerusalem's temple cult, is then understood to have replaced traditional family-based religious practices—namely, ancestor worship. These historical reconstructions focus on belief systems rather than cultural practices, much like the idealist-rationalists that Binford and others criticized. Setting aside the larger issues involving evolutionary models,¹¹⁶ theories of ancestor worship simply obfuscate the textual representation of ancestors. The Hebrew Bible universally opposes necromancy, yet ancestor worship is never clearly addressed. Moreover, where the dead are identified using kinship terminology, their appearance is positive.¹¹⁷ There simply are no biblical passages that denounce ancestors, as either fathers or peoples.

A typical proof-text used to support the existence of ancestor worship is Deut 26:14, which refers to the feeding of the dead.¹¹⁸ The interpretation is twofold. First, it understands the verse as a ban on the practice of placing food inside tombs. Second, it explains that the practice was forbidden because the food was meant as offerings for deified ancestors. But Deut 26:14, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4, only limits the practice of feeding the dead, a practice that is never banned in the Hebrew Bible otherwise. The presence of grave goods inside tombs should therefore not be interpreted as a

Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 206–8 and J. Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-mortem Existence,” *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995): 3–5.

114. See, e.g., H. C. Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 4–6. Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy,” 3 even mentions Tylor and Frazer!

115. See, e.g., E. Bloch-Smith, “The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 213–24 and Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy,” 15–16.

116. Put briefly, cultures do not develop complex features in the manner that nineteenth-century scholars thought they did.

117. Van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 226–31 pointed to names that combine kinship terms with theophoric elements as evidence for deified ancestors. Yet naming practices could be complicated, and the meaning of these names is uncertain without supporting evidence. On the problems with this suggestion, see Levenson, *Resurrection*, 54–56.

118. E.g., Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy,” 6 and van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 208–10.

form of sacrifice that competed with other Israelite/Judahite cultic practices.¹¹⁹ The evidence instead suggests that the biblical writers saw this form of interaction with the dead as something that was permissible under the proper circumstances. What were these circumstances? What does it mean to feed the dead? Rather than interpreting grave goods as dedications that reveal a belief in the deified dead, we should follow William Robertson Smith's lead and view them as implements of ritual action that played a structuring role in the social world of the biblical writers.

In ancient Judah and the Hebrew Bible an ancestor was a figure from the past who was claimed by the living as kin, irrespective of whether the kinship bond was fictive or real. These claims could be made through various means, including narrative traditions and genealogies, but it was important to recognize that the relationship was typically enacted through mortuary practices. Regardless of whether it was a figure from some great ancestral tradition, such as Abraham, or the more recently departed belonging to local kinship groups, the proper burial and treatment of the dead played a critical role in establishing who was an ancestor. Conversely, funerary rituals and mortuary practices enabled a society to identify the living, the descendants, to whom the ancestors belonged. This two-way relationship was a necessary component in establishing lineal descent. The ancestors anchored this system of descent and, as such, their burials could serve as markers of patrimony. For this reason, it was important to account for the dead inside the tomb, and this was often done through elaborate rituals of care, feeding, and reburial. Together with an extended patrilineal tradition, the cumulative effect of multiple generations interred inside a single complex—the family tomb—created collectives of the dead. The dead as an aggregate of ancestors formed important identities and established patrilineal systems of descent. But these ancestral collectives also represented an achieved status in death, one in which an individual ideally could join. The ancestors were thus referred to in biblical literature through kinship terminology as either the “fathers” or the “peoples.”

Contemplating Death

The concepts of death in the Hebrew Bible are unique in comparison with Western thought. Thus, this book will address two aspects of death that are particularly interconnected in biblical literature: death as transition and its

119. The idea of feeding the dead is at times presented as a social phenomenon yet interpreted as a form of family religion; see van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 208–18.

relational nature. These two aspects interconnect in the body and the tomb, so the purpose of this book is to study both. This study incorporates the archaeology of the Judahite bench tomb, Hebrew funerary inscriptions, and biblical literature. Part I analyzes the preexilic remains of mortuary practices, including epigraphic sources. These will establish the basis for part II, which studies the diverse and complicated notions of postmortem existence in biblical literature. The discussion that follows through the book's two parts recognizes the impact of Judahite mortuary culture on the thought world of the biblical writers, which continued into the postexilic period. By engaging what the sources say about postmortem existence and, importantly, how they say it, the book sets the biblical discourse of death in context. In light of Foucault's understanding of the word *discourse*,¹²⁰ the relational nature of death in the patrimonial societies of the Levant—specifically, Judah—will be examined through their language, social institutions, and cultural practices. This discourse involves not only mourning, lamenting, and acts of remembrance but also rituals that directly relate to the body, such as burial, the provision of care, and the removal of corpse contamination. In this wider array of cultural practices the ancestors play a primary role in that they embody the ideal of an afterlife.

The contextual approach in this book is similar to what Jan Assmann has called the *constellative* aspect of death in his important work *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*.¹²¹ The term here represents the constellation of identity-forming relationships and hence the interconnectedness of text, iconography, and artifact. "While still alive, [the ancient Egyptian] knew he was embedded in constellations that constituted him as self and person, son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother, citizen, subject, government official, soldier, scribe, priest, songstress, and so forth, relationships in which he developed and learned, relationships that sustained him, even beyond the threshold of death, just as deceased persons were linked to him during his lifetime."¹²² The embedded nature of the individual offers insight into how concepts of the afterlife were formed in cultures such as Egypt and Israel. Assmann's constellation encompassed the rich array of mortuary culture in ancient Egypt, allowing him to account for the Egyptian theology of death on

120. M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, World of Man (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 215–37. The term *discourse* here refers to the manner by which the living spoke of the dead, affecting both their memory and their status in death.

121. J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 408–11.

122. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 408.

multiple levels. The ideology of death in Egypt differs significantly from that of Judah and the Hebrew Bible, but Assmann's model can be applied to the cultural particulars of the Hebrew Bible. For the biblical writers, life and society revolved around covenants that connected kin and deity. The brief example of Abraham's promise, Gen 15:15–16, shows how such identity-forming networks could extend beyond the threshold of death, embodying the afterlife through ancestors. The wider corpus of biblical literature, explored throughout the rest of this book, will show the various ways this afterlife ideal worked. The context of this ideal was the tomb, and in the Hebrew Bible this concept of the afterlife was meaningful.

PART I

The Archaeology of Death in Iron Age Judah

Death as Transition in Judahite Mortuary Practices

UNDERSTANDING DEATH AS transition is not new or unusual. In biblical studies this idea is often restricted to concepts of postmortem judgment or rendered in terms of an otherworldly journey. Either the transition is vetted and the dead person is sent to paradise or punishment (Luke 16:19–31; Rev 20:11–15), or it is expressed through the well-known motif of descent into the netherworld. The latter concept is evident in Mesopotamian sources such as “Ishtar’s Descent into the Underworld,” and the impact of this concept can be traced in motifs that involve descending into death’s realm that appear in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 14:11–15; Ezek 32:18–30), and even the New Testament (Rom 10:6–7; Eph 4:8–10). The archaeological analysis of the Judahite rock-cut bench tomb provides a different view of transition, one that is facilitated through ritual and involves the transformation of the body. The notion of transition evident in this cultural phenomenon is relational in two senses: It accounts for both the individual and the collective, and the status of the dead is dependent upon the care provided by the living.

The condition of the dead body and its treatment inside the bench tomb offer new insight into the idea that postmortem existence in the Hebrew Bible is predicated on the fate of one’s mortal remains.¹ But the notion of fate and the concept of embodiment both require more nuance. For instance, the dead body inside the bench tomb exists in two states: first as a singular

1. To quote W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 2:213 as representative of an older school of biblical interpretation: “the survival of the dead person depends to a certain extent on the fate of his corpse.”

corpse and then as an assemblage of bones.² The second state is significant. The importance of bones is evident in the traditions of Jacob's and Joseph's deaths in Egypt and the transportation of their remains to be reburied in Canaan. In the case of Joseph, it was specifically his bones that were transported. The royal steward's funerary inscription likewise describes his bones as a critical component of his persona that survived inside the monumental confines of his sepulcher. The presence of the dead continued inside the tomb even after the body had been reduced to bones. Although the royal steward's tomb in Silwan only contained his remains along with his concubine, most Judahite tombs contained multiple burials. In the cases where the presence of bones inside the bench tomb is collective, scholars have associated this with the concept of collective ancestors evoked in the terms "peoples" and "fathers." The architectonic space of the bench tomb is designed to facilitate multiple generations of burials. This is most evident in the repository, a feature of the bench tomb where burials were secondarily collected, or gathered, and stored together. Inside the Judahite rock-cut tomb, the two states of the dead are recognizable in the burial bench and repository. These states of being were facilitated through funerary rituals that involved primary burials directed toward the bench and secondary burials directed toward the repository. Examining these rituals will let us understand the meaning assigned to such actions. The application of ritual theory to Judahite mortuary practices will suggest new ways of understanding the transition of the dead.

Transition did not involve an ethereal *place*. It was instead a conversion of *status* where the collection of bones inside each bench tomb represented the transcendent state of the collective dead: the ancestors. This is not to privilege the collective over the individual. The dead were important alike individually or collectively. Their status changed, however, with the corpse's decomposition. The transition of the dead inside the bench tomb is marked by the body, and this transition should be understood as a process. The analysis of how the bench tomb's features marked each stage of this transition will reveal a process of dying that extended beyond death.

2. See E. Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 33 (1970): 15–16 and his discussion of the corpse's status inside the tomb (body versus bones). The argument presented in this book, however, is that bones represented a transcendent state of being as one was reunited with dead kin (i.e., "gathered to one's people" in Gen 35:29 and 49:33). This is not to argue that the dead no longer required care once they were reduced to bones. The diminution of the dead should be associated with the natural decay of the flesh and, as such, should be taken to constitute a vulnerable state. In contrast, the disarticulated remains of the dead inside the repository represented a stable status and thus a less vulnerable state.

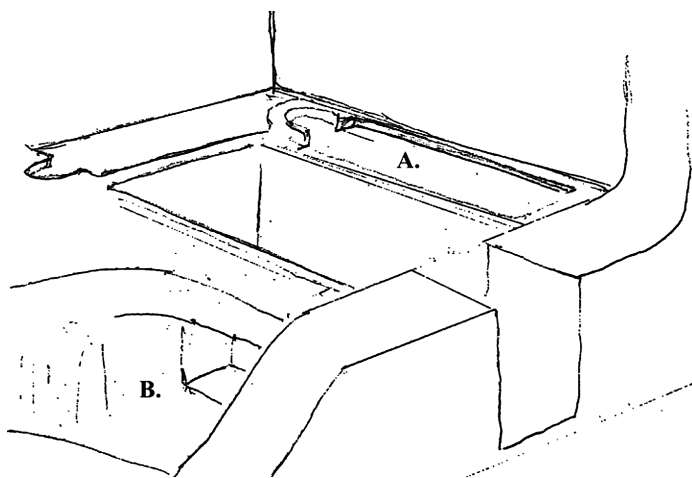


FIG. 1 The Judahite rock-cut bench tomb. A. bench; B. repository. Author's image.

The Judahite Bench Tomb as Ritual Space

The Judahite rock-cut bench tomb provides optimal data for studying death through the treatment of the dead body (see fig. 1).³ Most bench tombs are partially disturbed or entirely empty due to factors such as looting, reuse, or

3. For surveys and discussions of mortuary practices in Judah, and the bench tomb in particular, see G. Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," in *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period*, ed. I. Singer (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzak Ben-Zvi; Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 106–32 (Hebrew); Barkay, "Burial Caves and Dwellings in Judah During Iron Age II: Sociological Aspects," in *Material Culture, Society and Ideology: New Directions in the Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, ed. A. Faust and A. M. Maeir (Ramat Gan: Yad Ben-Zvi, Bar-Ilan University, and the Ingeborg Rennert Center, 1999), 96–102 (Hebrew); Barkay, "The Necropoli of Jerusalem in the First Temple Period," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Biblical Period*, ed. S. Ahituv and A. Mazar (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2000), 233–70 (Hebrew); E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series 7; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 123 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 41–52; Bloch-Smith, "Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65 (2002), 120–30; Bloch-Smith, "From Womb to Tomb: The Israelite Family in Death as in Life," in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. Dutcher-Walls (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 122–31; I. Yezereski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah," *Tel Aviv* 26 (1999): 254–57; Yezereski, "Typology and Chronology of the Iron Age II–III Judahite Rock-Cut Tombs," *Israel Exploration Journal* 63 (2013): 50–77; A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, "The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb: Family Response at a Time of Change," *Israel Exploration Journal* 58 (2008): 151–52; A. Fantalkin, "The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation," in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. A. Fantalkin and A. Yasur-Landau (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 19–35; and J. Osborne, "Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 70 (2011): 35–53.

quarrying. The remains of bench tombs, however, are optimal because they were cut out of rock. Thus their architectural plan is often preserved, providing data for analysis even in situations where they have long since been emptied.⁴ As the term for this type of tomb indicates, its defining feature—the bench—is a burial shelf.⁵ A Judahite tomb typically had three benches carved out of the side walls opposite the entrance.⁶ It also included a separate area for the secondary disposal of the dead, called the repository, which was either a pit, a unit carved under a bench like a crawl space, or a specific place on the floor. The bench and repository were used in different stages of burial. Together the architectural features suggest a dialectical relationship inside the

4. Unfortunately, the few examples that have been discovered intact have not been fully published; see, e.g., the remarks in R. Reich, "The Ancient Burial Ground in the Mamilla Neighborhood, Jerusalem," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 111–13. See A. Kloner and D. Davis, "A Burial Cave of the Late First Temple Period on the Slope of Mount Zion," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 107–10 and A. Biran and R. Gophna, "An Iron Age Burial Cave at Tel Halif," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970): 151–68. There are also cases where a full repository was discovered within a disturbed (or partially destroyed) tomb; these include the Tel Halif tomb excavated by Biran and Gophna, Chamber 25 of Cave 24 at Ketef Hinnom, published in G. Barkay, "Excavations at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 95–105, as well as Tomb 22 at Horbat Za'aq, published in I. Yezerski, "The Burial Ground at Horbat Za'aq," *Atiqot* 76 (2013): 14 and 15 fig. 21 and I. Yezerski and P. Nahshoni, "The Finds from the Horbat Za'aq Burial Ground," *Atiqot* 76 (2013): 62 pls. 12–15 and table 1.

5. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 41 distinguishes between arcosolia and benches, following the terminology used in the work on Late Bronze Age burials by Rivka Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan*, American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992). Although the shape and form of both are very similar, arcosolia are less common than bench tombs. Regardless, arcosolia burials still fall within the spectrum of mortuary practices and Judahite attitudes toward death, as will be discussed in chapter 2. In the most recent typology, Yezerski, "Typology and Chronology," 41–42 distinguishes between rock-hewn bench tombs and tombs that she calls "benched-niches." The former are tombs where the chamber (or chambers) is composed of straight-angle corners, flat ceilings, and benches carved out of the three sidewalls opposite the entrance. The latter are often augmented caves that are roughly planned with one or more benches and an arched ceiling. These are also known as loculus tombs. Although Yezerski's typology is helpful in addressing the variety of tombs in Judah, as is Bloch-Smith's discussion of arcosolia tombs, I prefer the term *bench tomb* as the general category for all Iron II–Iron III tombs in Judah that included a burial shelf.

6. Exceptions basically fall into two groups. The first group includes tombs built for one or two people; these are infrequent but do appear alongside (or at least in proximity to) communal tombs. Examples, which have a single shelf (usually a wide bench) and no repository, can be found in the Silwan cemetery in Jerusalem, as well as at Gibeon. The second group includes roughly hewn cave tombs found largely in the southern Shephelah, which usually have multiple tombs but are irregular in their form. There are also examples of tombs that have benches built for multiple inhumations, such as Chamber 25 of Cave Tomb 24 at Ketef Hinnom (see fig. 11), which has an extended bench fit for six corpses.

tomb between the different conditions of the dead, first as an intact corpse and then as a collection of disarticulated bones. Given this dynamic, it becomes possible to understand the bench tomb as ritual space, where the identity of the dead undergoes transition.

The Tomb as Separation

The first thing we want to consider about the Judahite bench tomb is its location. During the Iron Age, burials in Judah took place outside the inhabited space of the city or village. This custom is referred to as *extramural burial*. In western Palestine, bounded cemeteries were usually adjacent to the settlement or along the slopes of the settled mound. The extramural cemeteries of Judah, and the southern Levant in general, stand in contrast to the intramural burial practices common in the northern Levant and Mesopotamia during this period. Extramural cemeteries can be found outside of the settlement area at sites such as Gibeon,⁷ Beth-Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh), Tell Beit Mirsim,⁸ Khirbet el-Qôm (Makkedah),⁹ Lachish, Tel 'Ira,¹⁰ and Tel Ḥalif.¹¹ The most notable example is Jerusalem, which is surrounded by Iron Age cemeteries in Silwan, the Hinnom Valley, and north of Damascus Gate.¹² The cultural

7. H. Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," *Israel Exploration Journal* 37 (1987): 1–17 and fig. 1.

8. S. Ben-Arieh and D. Alon, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, IAA Reports (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 2 fig. o.2. Another example close to Tell Beit Mirsim is Ḥorbat Za'aq, which was probably the external cemetery for an Iron Age village located under the remains of the abandoned Palestinian village nearby; see Yezerski, "Burial Ground," 1–2.

9. W. G. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from Khirbet El-Kôm," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40–41 (1970–71), 139–204.

10. I. Beit-Arieh and A. G. Baron, "The Cemetery," in *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev*, ed. I. Beit-Arieh (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 129–69.

11. Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 151–68; O. Borowski, "Burial Customs in Southern Judah: The Case of Tel Halif," in *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. S. W. Crawford and A. Ben-Tor (Jerusalem: W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research & The Israel Exploration Society, 2007), 71–77; Borowski, *Lahav III: The Iron Age II Cemetery at Tell Ḥalif (Site 72)* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013). See also the brief discussion of pottery from this tomb by H. Katz and A. Faust, "The Chronology of the Iron Age IIA in Judah in the Light of Tel 'Eton Tomb C3 and Other Assemblages," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 371 (2014): 114 n. 11.

12. D. Ussishkin, "A Recently Discovered Monolithic Tomb in Siloam," in *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968–1974*, ed. Y. Yadin (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration

practice of extramural burial is thus firmly established in the archaeological record. But what does it mean? The question needs to be addressed not only within the wider context of mortuary practices but also in terms of the act of burial itself.

A few biblical texts offer insight into the implications of burying the dead outside the village. For example, 2 Sam 3:31 and Job 21:32–33 suggest that the transportation of the corpse to the tomb served as a type of public viewing. Other biblical texts such as Num 5:2 and 19:11–21 that deal with corpse contamination provide a possible explanation for the practice of extramural burial. The regulation of purity in the Hebrew Bible dealt severely with dead bodies, and this concept of corpse contamination continued into later phases of Jewish history. Likewise, the practice of extramural interment remains consistent for a considerable span of time, from the preexilic period through the postexilic and on into the later phases. Thus, two observations can be made: the first is that a concept of corpse contamination would override all other concerns. That is to say, a single intramural burial would have rendered the situation moot; everything around it would be contaminated. There is consequently little room for compromise. This observation explains why extramural burials are almost without exception in Iron Age Judah.¹³ The only exemptions were the royal burials of Jerusalem, according to biblical sources.¹⁴ Yet even this royal privilege was not above harsh prophetic critique, as is evident, for

Society, 1976), 63–65; Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993); G. Barkay, *A Treasure Facing Jerusalem's Walls* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum Catalogues, 1986); Barkay, "Excavations," 85–106; Barkay, "The Necropoli," 233–70.

13. The two exceptions are at Tel Dothan (in the north, outside of Judah proper) and Tell en-Naşbeh. At Dothan, the burials in Areas A and L appear in the seventh century and display Assyrian influence, so it is unclear whether these areas were unoccupied and used as a cemetery or whether the intramural burials are due to Assyrian culture; see D. M. Master, ed., *Dothan: Remains from the Tell (1953–1964)* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 112–13, 115. At Tell en-Naşbeh the burial in question occurred during the Neo-Babylonian period and is indicative of Mesopotamian culture.

14. See, e.g., 1 Kgs 22:51. The Tomb of David has yet to be located in Jerusalem; see M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 98–126. Samaria most likely had intramural royal tombs as well. N. Franklin, "The Tombs of the Kings of Israel: Two Recently Identified 9th Century Tombs from Omride Samaria," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 119 (2003): 1–11 has identified a subterranean structure in the palace at Samaria as a royal tomb. Note however the objections of D. Ussishkin, "Megiddo and Samaria: A Rejoinder to Norma Franklin," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 348 (2007): 49–70 and Franklin's response in N. Franklin, "Response to David Ussishkin," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 248 (2007): 71–73.

example, in Ezek 43:7–9.¹⁵ The second observation is that, regardless of its origin, the practice of extramural burial is not necessarily dependent upon biblical precepts regarding corpse contamination. The biblical texts concerning this matter belong to the priestly source, which is generally considered to be late, whether postexilic (Persian period) or late Iron Age, whereas extramural burial continues in Jewish cultures throughout the first millennium BCE. It seems likely, then, that the biblical regulations about corpse contamination bore some relationship to extramural burial customs, even if those regulations are a later codification of cultural practices that existed before they were written.¹⁶ The concern for purity versus corpse contamination constitutes the sort of binary opposition that Catherine Bell described in ritual. The purpose of such oppositions was to create difference. The distinction between pure and contaminated reveals boundaries, created through concepts of cultic purity, that separate the dead from the living.

Extramural burials could also signify an opposition of inside (the village) versus outside (the tomb), but this would have played a secondary role to the physical separation of the dead from the living. The exterior cemeteries represented the partition of space, and the physicality of this partition certainly played a role in the creation of ritualized difference observable not only in purity rites concerning contact with the dead but also in mourning customs. In the immediate context of mortuary practices relating to the corpse itself, it is possible to distinguish without further speculation a general separation phase that was initiated by the event of death. This phase of separation would have included the primary act of burial, as well as all associated practices.

The Liminal Space of the Tomb

Apart from the general separation demarcated by the cemetery's location, the design of the bench tomb's interior space suggests a liminal phase involving

15. Although the prophetic message is clear, the nature of the offense has been debated. I prefer to read the passage as concerned with corpse contamination and focused specifically on the problem of intramural royal tombs; Suriano, *Politics*, 109–10; see also J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 60–61, and N. Na'aman, "Death Formulae and the Burial Place of the Kings of the House of David," *Biblica* 85 (2004): 249–53. For a different approach, see F. Stavrakopoulou, "Exploring the Garden of Uzza: Death, Burial and Ideologies of Kingship," *Biblica* 87 (2006): 2–8.

16. The concept of contamination in the biblical sources is an issue not of hygiene but of ritual purity reflecting the concerns of Jerusalem's temple. According to J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, 62, the pure-impure dichotomy was a "hierarchy of status" that was structural and reflected the exclusive nature of priest and temple.

the dead. Liminality is evident here in the temporary space for the corpse carved out of the tomb's walls—the bench—versus its final resting place inside the repository. This spatial arrangement facilitates the process of secondary burial rites: the transfer and reburial of remains, also called *ossilegium*.¹⁷ The transportation of the body to the tomb and its placement on the bench was the primary burial. The eventual reburial of the body inside the repository in the form of disarticulated bones was the secondary burial. The liminal phase involved the time that spanned these two events: the primary and secondary burials.

During the primary phase, the dead would be publicly visible for the last time as the body was carried to the privacy of the tomb. In a few cases, an entrance chamber may have served as the place for the final preparation of the body before the primary burial.¹⁸ Otherwise it is difficult to tell whether this was done outside the tomb or prior to transporting the body to the tomb. The monumental Iron IIIA tombs at Saint-Étienne (Cave Complex 1–2) and Ketef Hinnom (Burial Cave 24) each included a chamber that may have been intended for the treatment of the corpse. Toggle pins and other metal implements often found inside tombs indicate that the body was wrapped in cloth.¹⁹ The presence of pitchers, dipper juglets, and related vessels suggests that the body was washed and anointed during the primary burial. Indeed, a well-known feature of tomb assemblages during the Iron II period is the black juglet (see fig. 2).²⁰ Storage vessels found in tombs at Beth-Shemesh, Lachish, and Tel 'Ira may also indicate some form of washing at the burial site. Once

17. The term *ossilegium* is used for bone gathering in archaeological studies. For ossuaries, see L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (1981): 175–76 and Rahmani, "Ossuaries and *Ossilegium* (Bone-Gathering) in the Late Second Temple Period," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 191–205.

18. E.g., Tomb 1 at Gibeon; see Eshel, "Late Iron Age Cemetery," 3–4, fig. 2. See also the comments on the cemetery at Tel Ḥalif, regarding the antechamber of Tomb 16 in Borowski, *Lahav III*, 7, 47–49. Other prominent examples can be seen in the tombs at an-Nabi Danyal, southwest of Bethlehem, published by D. Amit and I. Yezerski, "An Iron Age II Cemetery and Wine Presses at an-Nabi Danyal," *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 171–93.

19. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 86–87 and Borowski, "Burial Customs," 73.

20. Reich, "Ancient Burial Ground," 114. Borowski, *Lahav III*, 8–9 points to an abundance of "black juglets" found at Tel Ḥalif and suggests that they were for ointments used for preparing the dead body. Black juglets were among the most prominent pottery types found in the Iron Age tombs at Tell en-Naşbeh; see C. C. McCown, *Tell en-Naşbeh, Excavated under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè* (Berkeley, CA: The Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion and The American Schools of Oriental Research, 1947), 89–92, table 3. For recent analyses of this pottery type and its development, see O. Zimhoni, "The Pottery of Levels V and IV and Its Archaeological and Chronological

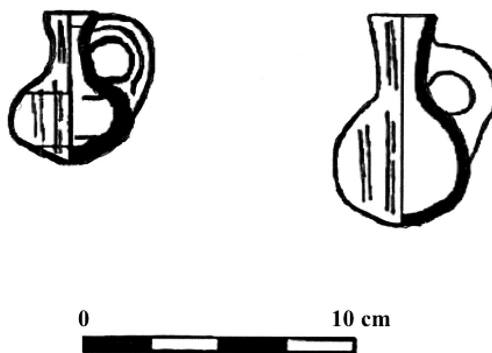


FIG. 2 Black juglets from Tomb C₃ at Tel 'Eton, excavated by Trude Dothan on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities (Katz and Faust 2014, 113, fig. 8). Image courtesy Avraham Faust and the American Schools of Oriental Research.

the body was placed on the burial bench, the tomb was sealed with a large stone.²¹

For the dead, these rites of separation mark not the end but the beginning of another stage of existence. At the burial site, following the initial preparation of the dead body, the corpse was placed in a supine position upon one of the tomb's benches. In this state the dead individual was provisioned with food, drink, and other supplies such as lamps. The typical remains found inside tombs, and the architectural features of the tombs themselves, shed light on how the dead were perceived. A few tombs have been discovered with primary burials still intact, each bench containing a skeleton lying on its back.²² As the body rested on the bench, various items were placed around it, often revealing patterns of distribution. In some tombs, a lamp was found set

Implications," in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, ed. D. Ussishkin (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004), 1696 and Katz and Faust, "Chronology," 111.

21. The closing of the tomb obviously had functional purposes; among others, it kept animals from scavenging the tomb. In some cases, a bench tomb had a *dromos* (or stepped entrance), which is often seen in the Shephelah, where the soft limestone of the Eocene period is more easily hewn. In one such case, at Tel Ḥalif, a bench tomb had a *dromos* with an outside and inside entrance. The inside entrance leading into the burial chamber was sealed shut with a squared stone; see Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 151. Stone doors have also been discovered in Tomb 18 at Ḥorbat Za'aq; see Yezerki, "Burial Ground," 6–7 fig. 8.

22. Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 107–10. The length and design of the bench, as well as the incorporation of headrests, indicate the position of the primary burial.

next to the corpse's head.²³ Lamps are common items in tomb assemblages,²⁴ but the placement of lamps alongside the dead is evident even in tombs long since emptied of grave goods. Several examples exist of a smoothed surface carved on a bench, adjacent to a headrest, which suggests that it was intended for an item such as a lamp.²⁵ Another feature found inside some bench tomb chambers is a lamp niche carved into the wall,²⁶ and soot marks above the niches show that the lamps were used to provide light. But the placement of lamps next to the head of the corpse indicates a symbolic function that was directed specifically at the dead individual.²⁷

Provisions placed alongside the dead body also include jugs, juglets, and cooking pots. In a few cases, a cooking pot was placed at the feet of the corpse, or juglets were placed along the sidewalls next to the bench.²⁸ In fact, ceramic wares were often set on the floor next to and below the reposed corpse.²⁹ These remains are the expression of a need to provide sustenance for the dead while they lay inside the tomb. The function appears to be particularly related to the existence of the interred individual, recumbent upon the bench. The evidence from the repositories strongly suggests that grave goods were removed from the bench when the associated human remains were removed. During this time all items were cleared and redistributed together inside the repository.³⁰ Once the body was removed from the bench, the grave goods that accompanied the body ceased to serve a purpose.

23. Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 107–8.

24. Borowski, *Lahav III*, 8 and Yezereski and Nahshoni, "Finds," 35–36 figs. 3, 5–8, 15, 17, 19.

25. A. Kloner, "Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and Its Vicinity," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 19–20 (2001–2): 108. Kloner also points to Tomb 16 at Silwan; see Ussishkin, *Village*, 108, 105 ill. 78, and 107 ill. 82.

26. E.g., Tomb 1 at Gibeon; see Eshel, "Late Iron Age Cemetery," 4.

27. The discovery of lamps in tomb assemblages that lack soot marks, showing that they were never used, also suggests that their function was symbolic.

28. Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 152 and Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 108.

29. This is evident in the Mount Zion tomb at Jerusalem as well as the undisturbed tomb at Tel Ḥalif, but it is also apparent from the remains found across the floors of several disturbed tombs. For the Mount Zion tomb, see Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 108; for the Tel Ḥalif tomb, see Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 152. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 80 also points to the appearance of wine jars in tomb assemblages around Jerusalem (as well as Ammon in Transjordan) beginning in the late ninth century.

30. Again, this is obvious in the remains found inside the intact repositories at Ketef Hinnom and Ḥorbat Za'aq; see also Tomb 9 published in Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 5. At Tel Ḥalif, the repository was filled almost to the chamber's ceiling; see Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 152 and Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 108.

The transfer of the bench's remains to the repository most likely occurred when space was needed for additional interments, but it is unclear how much time would pass generally between primary and secondary burials. The latter act would probably have required enough time for the corpse's flesh to decay in order to allow for the disassembling of the skeleton. This act of reburial was important. Even in the few examples of tombs without repositories, the distribution of bones inside the chamber, often at the base of the bench, shows that secondary rituals were still practiced.³¹

Marginality and Identity in Judahite Mortuary Practices

The manner in which the body was secondarily stored inside the repository signaled a change in the perception of the dead.³² Typically once the corpse's flesh had decayed, the bones would be taken apart and removed from the bench along with all associated grave goods to be reburied. These actions indicate a destructive element to secondary burial; the bones and accompanying goods at times were broken during their transfer to the repository.³³ But the repository itself represents an ideal of preservation.³⁴ The bones of former burials were not removed from the tomb, nor were they discarded in a manner that would result in their destruction.³⁵ Following John Robb, then, it is important to look at the cultural implications of how the dead were disposed

31. Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 108–9.

32. This point has been raised before, such as in the study of the LB–Iron I tomb at Tel Dothan (not Judahite); see R. E. Cooley, "Gathered to His People: A Study of a Dothan Family Tomb," in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, ed. M. Tuchand and R. Youngblood (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 52; R. E. Cooley and G. D. Pratico, "Gathered to His People: An Archaeological Illustration from Tell Dothan's Western Cemetery," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M. D. Coogan et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 89. Aside from Dothan, this interpretation of secondary burials is found also in other studies. P. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 62; and R. E. Tappy, "Did the Dead Ever Die in Biblical Judah?," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 298 (1995): 59–68.

33. This was usually unintentional, although it is possible that a bone could be broken if necessary to fit it into the opening of a repository.

34. This applies to any form of secondary ritual within the Judahite tomb, whether it was focused on redistributing remains along the floor, in a separate chamber, or in a repository.

35. Meyers, "Secondary Burials," 15 and J. Kamlah, "Grab und Begräbnis in Israel/Juda," in *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in Seiner Umwelt*, ed. A. Berlejung and B. Janowski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 275.

of in Judah. The custom of secondary burial resonates with the concerns found in biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources for protecting bones (e.g., 2 Sam 21:12–14). It also provides an important contrast with curses found in these sources that involve the destruction of bones (e.g., Deut 28:26 and Jer 8:1–3). The bench tomb was a place of multiple burials, and inside this place each reburial resulted in the safe storage of bones. In light of this concern, the bench tomb as family burial site could serve as a single location for multiple generations.³⁶ The significance of bones becomes clearer if we explore the movement of the body inside the ritual space of the Judahite tomb.

The bench tomb served as a controlled environment for ritual action.³⁷ Within this environment, death was ritualized and traced through the movement of the body. The deliberate actions involved in disposing of the dead, particularly the placement of the body in specific locations, indicate ritual performance. The meaning assigned to the body shifted as it was placed in each location, first as an intact corpse and then as part of a collective of bones. If we examine the funerary rituals that followed the body through primary and secondary burial it becomes possible to understand the dialectical meaning of the bench and the repository that existed inside a typical Iron Age Judahite tomb. Judahite mortuary practices involved a process that spanned both time (from primary to secondary burial) and space (bench and repository). The dynamics involved in such practices can be closely analyzed using concepts taken from transition ritual theory. This is not to advocate a strict, three-part process. The theoretical framework of transition rituals allows us to address mortuary practices not as a singular action tied to the event of death but as actions in their totality, from beginning to end.

Death should be termed more precisely *biological death* because the concept of mortality in the Iron Age Levant was much more fluid than our modern understanding. The placement of the dead body inside the tomb, located in an extramural cemetery, can be described in Arnold van Gennep's terms as a *rite of separation*. But the ritual was much more complicated. The concept of separation affected the living and the dead, the former through bereavement and the latter in their new mode of existence. The analysis of the postmortem state of being that follows the separation of the dead is best served using the terms *liminality* and *marginality*. The time that transpired between the primary and secondary burials reveals the liminality of Judahite mortuary practices. The physical space of the corpse reveals a concept of marginality that

36. Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices," 110.

37. J. Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *History of Religions* 20 (1980): 124–25.

unfolded inside the tomb. The two terms are interrelated. The dead individual took on a marginalized status during the liminal stage of the ritual. The dead body becomes a ritualized object that is transformed within the ritual space of the tomb.

Scholars have noted that the presence of grave goods indicates a belief in the continued existence of the dead inside the tomb,³⁸ yet the idea of existence is never qualified, nor is it explored further. Although the reasons for grave goods are not self-evident, their presence suggests certain purposes. The large number of objects indicates that the grave goods were primarily symbolic. Furthermore, the objects were more often directed toward the dead bodies reposed upon the benches than toward the collective gathering of mortal remains inside the repository, and this can be explained in a couple of different ways.³⁹ These items may reflect a belief that the dead were powerful beings who required appeasement in order to placate their restless manner and keep them inside the tomb.⁴⁰ Alternatively, they may reflect a view of the defunct individual as being in a deprived state necessitating grave goods for sustenance.⁴¹ The ritual explanation offered here favors the latter interpretation, as the status of corpse would have required attendance and accommodation during the liminal phase, while the body was reposed upon the temporary space of the burial bench.

Victor Turner has shown that the liminal phase is the most tenuous part of the ritual process.⁴² It is during this phase that the actor exists without a fixed identity. Thus, liminality is the dangerous period during which the very existence of the ritual actor—in this case, the entombed corpse—is at stake. The rituals of marginality create the conditions endured by the dead during their temporary status, as the natural decay of the body was allowed to take place

38. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 148.

39. Note, however, that the repository at the Tel Ḥalif tomb had items placed along its exterior; see Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 166–68. Likewise, Tomb 25 at Ketef Hinnom had items placed inside the tomb chamber (and near the repository) in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, long after the tomb's period of use. These offerings probably indicate ongoing acts meant to honor the family tomb by symbolically providing for those interred within, although it is unclear how common the practice was during the life of the tomb.

40. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 122–23 and the brief comments in J. E. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 85.

41. B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 6, 10–11, 259 n. 540.

42. V. W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 96–99.

inside the tomb. The purpose of grave goods thus seems to have been temporary, and liminal. When the contents of the bench were removed in order to make room for the next burial, the grave goods were transferred to the repository along with the human remains. All of the remains on the burial bench, both the body and associated grave goods, were removed during secondary burial, which may suggest that they experienced a temporary existence up to this stage. The fact that the grave goods were no longer necessary indicates that the status of the interred individual had changed. The corpse's gradual decay could have taken on symbolic meanings that related to life and death, such as the inevitable nature of mortality and the uncontrollable phenomenon of death.

The presentation of the body on the burial bench, where it was accommodated with grave goods and attended to by the living, was a form of control through ritual. By allowing the natural course of action—namely, the decomposition of the flesh—to take place, the survivors of the dead were able to control the uncontrollable, giving power to ritual through periodic routine.⁴³ Thus, through the course of action that took place inside the Judahite tomb, the liminality of the dead related directly to the biological changes that were visible in the body. In this sense, liminality represented the marginality of the dead person as they transformed from corpse to ancestor. The repository symbolized the collective preservation of past generations, but the dead existed inside this space in an undifferentiated mass. Archaeologists have pointed to the communal nature of the Judahite tomb, and the repository in particular, and have drawn parallels with the collective concepts of identity that are embedded within the biblical idioms:⁴⁴ “gathered to his peoples” and “lay down with his fathers.” To be sure, the connection between literary idiom and cultural practice is conceptual. Both reveal a common ideal based upon collective representation.⁴⁵ Yet

43. Smith, “Bare Facts,” 124–25.

44. Meyers, “Secondary Burials,” 15–17; Barkay, “Burial Caves and Burial Practices,” 106–15; and Suriano, *Politics*, 32–49.

45. For this reason, Jacob can be “gathered to his peoples” in Egypt before he is buried in Canaan (Gen 49:33; 50:13). The specific reference to burial in the family tomb confirms the ideal at work in the expression. Although some biblical scholars continue to dismiss any cultural connection between burial practices and the formulaic idioms for death (“gathered to his people” and “lay with his fathers”), it should be noted that this point is rather confused. Earlier scholars clearly saw that these expressions originated in burial customs, though they speculated that the phrases developed a separate literary meaning. See, e.g., G. R. Driver, “Plurima Mortis Imago,” in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham Neuman*, ed. M. Ben-Horin, B. D. Weinryb, and S. Zeitlin (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 137–42. Yet this is the point, for the common culture shared by text and artifact is ideological, not practical. That is,

individual expressions of death and dying also play an important role in biblical literature,⁴⁶ seen notably in poetic passages such as Ps 88, where the psalmist cries out to God from Sheol. The experience of the dead individual in this psalm, which will be discussed in chapter 7, reflects the complex ways by which identity was negotiated inside the tomb.

The mortuary practices implied by the structure and remains of the Judahite bench tomb suggest a transition of identity. Transition is evident even at the most basic level of understanding the bench tomb. Within this type of tomb the dead were buried individually and then reburied collectively. This implies a process of identification but, more than this, indicates that the transition of the corpse on the burial bench marked the end of individual selfhood. This is not to say that individual forms of identity were completely eradicated. The names of the dead could be remembered for generations by various means, including tomb inscriptions. Often these names were evoked in various collective, genealogical schemata. Names could be remembered within a larger setting, etched inside a communal tomb or recorded in extended lineages, but these settings are tacit indications of the power of corporate identity. Along this line of thought, identification—here, the translation of identity—can be understood as a critical process within the rites of aggregation: the former state is literally broken down as the dead are subsumed into a corporate status of ancestorhood.

Synthesis

The rituals of secondary burial that occur in the Judahite bench tomb offer a particular view of death as transition. The threshold separating the living from the dead was marked in the transition of the corpse as it decomposed inside the tomb. This state required careful treatment, as the body was placed on the bench and surrounded with grave goods. The liminal nature of the body as it existed during the period between the primary burial and the secondary rites meant that it was marginalized. The body was marginalized because it was no longer alive. But the corpse could still be physically recognizable, and the

the expression “lay with his fathers” is meant not to be a literal description but to communicate the ideology generated by communal burial customs, where the collective presence of the dead inside the family tomb is consonant with the evocation of collective ancestors. What the idioms represent, through burial imagery, is a sense of completion; see J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 28; Suriano, *Politics*, 26–50; and Suriano, “Death, Disinheritance, and Job’s Kinsman-Redeemer,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 56–59.

46. A. C. Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 493 (New York: T & T Clark, 2008).

body continued to be identified through ritual activities such as mourning, lamenting, and remembering. The corpse also required food and other provisions. The period of decomposition would have allowed the living—the bereaved—to settle affairs and readjust as certain rites of mourning and remembrance were completed. The processes that occurred both inside and outside the tomb would ideally resolve themselves in time, and the dead would eventually achieve an ancestral identity.

As the dead person transitioned from corpse to the collective ancestry, the liminal period was perilous and affected the dead body's surroundings. Because it was an entity without a fixed state, the corpse was considered impure. The tomb, as the place of the dead, effectively captured and contained this impurity. This form of marginalization offers insight into the use of the term נֶפֶשׁ to signify a corpse, which will be explored further in chapter 4. The death of the individual, the transfer of the body to the tomb, and the concurrent rituals of remembrance would bring the corpse in contact with the living. The recognition of its marginalized status in biblical literature was therefore crucial. The bones, on the other hand, while still impure, reflected the permanence of the tomb, and the repository's collection of bones represented a fixed status. The tomb served as a multigenerational house for the dead and was a permanent marker of ancestral status. To be remembered by name by one's third or fourth generation was a well-known afterlife ideal in the ancient Near East, but this was an ideal reserved for a select few. For the average person, the collective category of ancestors that transcended generations could serve the same purpose, offering hope and security in the afterlife.

The study of death as transition in Judahite mortuary practices suggests two final ideas. The first concerns the acceptance of death in Judah and reflected in biblical literature. The corpse as an embodied threshold separating the dead from the living and the elaborate rituals that surrounded the corpse together indicate that death was not denied but rather controlled. Death was inevitable and unavoidable, and for these reasons it was important in Judah to establish boundaries. These boundaries carefully restricted the activities of the living, but they did not ban them. Nor do these boundaries indicate that Yahweh, as a living deity, was absent from the tomb. Hebrew funerary inscriptions invoking Yahweh's blessings, reviewed in chapter 3, indicate that the Judahite deity had power over both the living and the dead.

The second point concerns the nature of dying. The actions of the living on behalf of the dead suggest an understanding of death that differed from modern Western notions. The requirement of care and feeding during the transitional phase of the bench tomb indicates that the corpse was still dying. Allan Kellehear has suggested that dying was understood in past cultures as a

postmortem process.⁴⁷ The process itself, though initiated by biological death, was mythologized through journeys into the netherworld.⁴⁸ Considering that we typically understand the process of dying today as premortem, it is easy to see how scholars of the ancient world could overlook this important concept of mortality.⁴⁹ The boundaries produced through Judahite funerary rituals support this concept and indicate that death was understood to be a dynamic process rather than a static event. Dying was a process that took place after the expiration of life. These conceptual boundaries, in turn, suggest new ways of understanding not only the נפש as corpse but also the image of the psalmist crying out from Sheol. Death as transition implies a beginning and end (fate and destiny), but this transition requires a liminal process. The Hebrew Bible's ambiguous image of death is due, in no small part, to this perilous phase that affected the body caught between the living and the ancestors.

47. A. Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15–17.

48. Kellehear, *Social History*, 9–65.

49. A modern example of dying could be a terminally ill person, someone wounded, or someone advanced in age.

The History of the Judahite Bench Tomb

IT IS EASY to view death as an ahistorical phenomenon, especially given that it is a universal experience. But the driving force of history affected mortuary practices, from the cultural significance assigned to the dead to the control and manipulation of the corpse. Decisions about who to include or exclude from a burial site, how to bury the dead, and where to place them were influenced by multiple things. Concern for the dead, as I showed in the Prolegomenon, was governed by political, religious, and social factors, and cemeteries could be strongly associated with inheritance. Past generations were reconstructed and embodied inside the Judahite bench tomb through collective burials. This practice formed a collective identity, symbolized in the tomb. Through the collective dead inside the tomb—the ancestors—the living could connect with patrilineal systems of descent.

The custom of burying the dead in a bench tomb was unique to Judah during the Iron Age. But it reflects cultural practices that go back to the Bronze Age, and the crystallization of such practices in Iron II Judah—specifically secondary burial—established trends that continued into Second Temple Judaism. A close examination of the history of Judahite mortuary culture will help us understand the social and political forces that shaped practices associated with the bench tomb, particularly during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. It will allow us to ask why secondary burial was important during this particular time period. And it will enable us to discuss the cultural meaning encoded in the architecture of the bench tomb. The meaning of the tomb and the entombed dead in Judah provides a foundation for understanding the complexity of death in the Hebrew Bible.

Mortuary Practices in the Iron Age

Judahite rock-cut bench tombs are widely attested during Iron Age II, yet the history of their development is both complicated and ambiguous. The early

appearance of this tomb type in the Shephelah contrasts with its absence in the central highlands during this period. Indeed, the lack of archaeologically attested mortuary practices in the central highlands in Iron Age I is striking.¹ This is usually attributed to the egalitarian ideology of proto-Israelite settlements during the twelfth and eleventh centuries. On the other hand the growing popularity of the bench tomb in the eighth and seventh centuries is attributed to the development of Judah as a cultural and political entity.² Both of these observations are generally correct, but tracing the history of the bench tomb will give us a more nuanced understanding of its cultural significance.

The Judahite bench tomb developed from multiple cultural trends that are apparent already in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (henceforth the MB–LB), if not earlier.³ On the one hand it continues the common MB–LB practice of cave tombs located outside of settled areas. This type of tomb generally served collective interments, and the collective remains were occasionally given secondary burial.⁴ Bounded cemeteries were created in order to facilitate lineal

1. G. Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," in *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period*, ed. I. Singer (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzak Ben-Zvi and Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 160 n. 211 (Hebrew). See also R. E. Tappy, "Did the Dead Ever Die in Biblical Judah?," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 298 (1995): 65–66 and table 1, which is based on his analysis of the data collected in E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series 7; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 123 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 60–62, tables 2–4.

2. The various theories range from external factors to internal developments. For external factors based on the threat of Assyrian expansion in the eighth century, see D. Hopkins, "Bare Bones: Putting Flesh on the Economics of Ancient Israel," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, ed. V. Fritz and P. R. Davies, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 228 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 139. For internal developments, see A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, "The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb: Family Response at a Time of Change," *Israel Exploration Journal* 58 (2008): 156–62 and A. Fantalkin, "The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation," in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. A. Fantalkin and A. Yasur-Landau (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17–44.

3. R. Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan*, American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series 7 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992) and R. S. Hallote, "Real and Ideal Identities in Middle Bronze Age Tombs," *Near Eastern Archaeologist* 65 (2002): 105–11.

4. The practice of secondary burials and ossilegium has a long and well-documented history in the Levant; see W. G. Dever, "Funerary Practices in EB IV (MB I) Palestine: A Study in Cultural Discontinuity," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (New York: Four Quarters, 1987), 11–18; E. Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 33 (1970): 2–29; Levi Y. Rahmani,

claims to land or other resources.⁵ On the other hand the deliberate structural plan of a conventional bench tomb is similar to intramural tombs, or tombs built beneath homes, such as those at Megiddo during the MB.⁶ Intramural tombs emulated the house and thus created a means of unifying generations both living and dead. Later Iron Age bench tombs often display features such as a stepped entrance (dromos) and squared chambers, both of which figure prominently in MB–LB intramural tombs.⁷

The most consistent feature of Judahite tombs was their extramural location. Why extramural cemeteries were so critically important in Judah is a matter of interpretation, and two general suggestions have been made. The first is the concern for corpse contamination, which was touched upon in the previous chapter and will be closely examined later in this book. The second suggestion is that the extramural location was related to land and patrimony. Bounded cemeteries outside of settled areas gave the inhabitants the ability to claim local resources. Both suggestions—purity and inheritance—can be addressed only in light of the bench tomb's history. The historical review in this chapter will divide the occurrence of bench tombs in the southern Levant into three phases that span the late eleventh century until the sixth century, beginning with the Iron IB/Iron IIA, then Iron IIB until early Iron IIIA, and

"Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (1981): 172–73; and G. A. London, "Homage to the Elders," *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (1987): 70–74. The practice could be manifest in different ways, from skull burials to ossuaries, or the transfer of remains into a collective space inside a tomb or a charnel house; see S. Chesson, "Libraries of the Dead: Early Bronze Age Charnel Houses and Social Identity at Urban Bab edh-Dhra', Jordan," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 18 (1999): 137–64. The Judahite repository undoubtedly reflects multiple influences but, in its application, it is a continuation of the internal transfer of mortuary remains within a single tomb structure. The diversity of secondary burial practices was also related to the nature of the cave tomb as a burial unit, which was almost always extramural but not always associated with a settlement; see Gonen, *Burial Patterns*, 12.

5. E.g., while Dever, "Funerary Practices," 15–18 emphasized the pastoralist element of secondary burials during the late third millennium, London "Homage to the Elders," 73–74 related this to the establishment of ancestral identities.

6. R. S. Hallote, "Tombs, Cult, and Chronology: A Reexamination of the Middle Bronze Age Strata of Megiddo," in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse*, ed. S. R. Wolff (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 199–214 and R. Gonen, "Structural Tombs in the Second Millennium B.C.," in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods*, ed. A. Kempinski and R. Reich (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 153–55.

7. The adaption of the dromos is seen already in the cist tombs of the important LB cemetery at Tell el-Ajjul; see Gonen, "Structural Tombs," 152.

finally the late Iron IIIA through Iron IIIB.⁸ Although space prohibits a more comprehensive review of the archaeological materials, a few select examples of Iron Age sites will offer insight into the development of this type of tomb and lead to new suggestions regarding its historical implications.

The First Phase: Iron Age IB to Iron Age IIA

During the Iron IA and Iron IB mortuary practices in the area that would later become Judah are marked by two contrasting phenomena. The first is the paucity of cemeteries associated with Iron I villages, and the second is the continuity of certain burial customs from the MB–LB. At this early phase, it is difficult to relate or reconcile these phenomena. Although the two are usually addressed separately, they are occasionally given explanations that are concerned more with their origins and less with the nature of the problem. The question that should be asked is not necessarily where these mortuary practices came from, but why they developed in such a distinct manner.

There is a dearth of mortuary remains in the central highland villages during the Iron I, the period during which the proto-Israelites emerged in this area.⁹ Thus the egalitarian ideal, interpreted in small agrarian sites such as Khirbet Raddana and Giloh, is applied also to burial customs.¹⁰ Cist burials, lacking any complex architectural setting, would have left little trace in the material record

8. The dates for the Iron Age and its subperiods follow the dates and divisions in A. Mazar, "The Debate over the Chronology of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant," in *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text, and Science*, ed. T. E. Levy and T. Higham (London: Equinox, 2005), 16, table 2.1. For the low chronology dates and divisions, see I. Finkelstein and E. Piasefsky, "The Iron Age Chronology Debate: Is the Gap Narrowing?," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74 (2011): 50–54.

9. R. Kletter, "People without Burials? The Lack of Iron I Burials in the Central Highlands of Palestine," *Israel Exploration Journal* 52 (2002): 28–48 has attributed the contrast of Iron I burial customs with previous LB cemeteries to issues of social stratification. The paucity of Iron I burials is due to the egalitarian structure of proto-Israelite settlements. E. Bloch-Smith, "Resurrecting the Iron I Dead," *Israel Exploration Journal* 54 (2004): 77–91 has challenged Kletter's dating and disputed his conclusions, drawing from a more expansive map of Iron I settlements.

10. A. Faust, "Mortuary Practices, Society and Ideology: The Lack of Iron I Burials in the Highlands in Context," *Israel Exploration Journal* 54 (2004): 174–84 has argued that the lack of material traces of burial should be attributed to ideological factors, rather than the societal factors suggested by Kletter, "People without Burials?," 38–40. Either way, the dearth of complex burial units should be taken as the result of a deliberate choice on the part of the proto-Israelites in order to differentiate themselves. Faust's theory is an important contribution to the study of death in the Iron Age Levant because he does not begin by approaching such customs as passive reflections of social conditions. Instead he looks at mortuary customs as actively manifested and at times even resisted through cultural practices.

of the early Iron Age. At the same time, the few instances of cave tombs in the Iron IB and Iron IIA would suggest cultural confluence with local Canaanites, among other groups, and this continuity would have certainly played a role in Judah's eclectic heritage. But the history of Iron Age mortuary practices is also explained regionally, and the origins of the bench tomb are often associated with the lowland hills—the Shephelah—where the earliest examples are found along with their cultural forerunners.¹¹ Thus the early appearance of bench-like tombs at Shephelah sites such as Khirbet Tell el-Beidā, Tel 'Eton (Eglon?), and Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) is contrasted with the absence of such practices in the central highlands during the Iron IB. While I will not necessarily dispute these points in this chapter, reexamining them and shifting the historical perspective will enable us to understand why a specific custom of burying the dead—the bench tomb—became so prominent in the Iron II period. This examination will begin with two sites that contain examples of LB precursors to Iron II Judahite mortuary culture, even though both are on the periphery or outside of Judah proper: Tell el-Far'ah (South) and Tel Dothan. Both sites have burials that span the transitional period between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I.

Tell el-Far'ah (South) is located in the western Negev. Although the area would later become part of the kingdom of Judah, a few of the late LB–Iron I burials at the site (Cemetery 500) have been referred to as *Philistine* due to some of the ceramic remains found among the grave goods.¹² Burial structures at the site (Cemetery 900 and Cemetery 500), however, bear closer affinity to later Judahite tombs than they do to Philistine cist burials.¹³ Architecturally, the burial structures of Tell el-Far'ah (South) can be termed *loculus tombs*. At Tell el-Far'ah (South) the tombs consist of a stepped-dromos entryway leading to a

11. Fantalkin, "Appearance," 17–44. The Shephelah origin of Judahite mortuary practices is supported by the finds at Tel 'Eton, the only cemetery of its kind in the region that shows continuity from the LB to the Iron IIB periods; see A. Faust and H. Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery: An Introduction," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 5 (2016): 183.

12. Setting aside the complicated problems of assigning cultural identity based on pottery, there are also issues with the chronology of Cemeteries 900 and 500 at Tell el-Far'ah (South); Meyers, "Secondary Burials," 12; see T. L. McClellan, "Chronology of the 'Philistine' Burials at Tell el-Far'ah (South)," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 6 (1979): 57–73.

13. Meyers, "Secondary Burials," 12–13 points to the architectural features in the tombs of the Tel el-Far'ah (S) cemeteries, including Cemetery 200 (Iron I), as evidence for the secondary burial and the collection of bones. These mortuary practices, however, differ from what we now know about Philistine burial customs. At the Iron IIA cemetery at Ashkelon, the predominant burial type was a simple pit; see D. M. Master and A. J. Aja, "The Philistine Cemetery of Ashkelon," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 377 (2017): 135–59. Even the few examples of built tombs are dissimilar from Judahite rock-cut tombs. As noted by Master and Aja, the pit burials at Ashkelon, a known Philistine site,

semirectangular chamber with bench-like shelves called *loculi*. Although the architectural features of these tombs, such as the dromos, were once thought to be evidence of foreign influence,¹⁴ they are now generally considered to be a local innovation.¹⁵ W. H. Stiebing suggested that these tombs are a local adaptation of an earlier bilobate style.¹⁶ He also pointed to *loculus* tombs, seen at Tell el-Ajjul and Lachish, as another architectural forerunner of the Tell el-Far'ah (South) bench tombs. In each example, the development of a squared or semirectangular chamber with benches on either side is tied to an earlier plan with either two interconnected rounded chambers (bilobate) or a plan that includes small carved spaces (*loculi*) around the sidewalls of the chamber. The common theme in these architectural traditions was the adaptation of a cave-like space for multiple burials.

The *loculus*-like tomb also appears at the Tel Dothan cemetery in Tomb 1,¹⁷ which dates from the fourteenth to the twelfth centuries BCE. This tomb is a precursor to the secondary burial practices that appear later in Judah during the Iron II. Tomb 1 of Dothan's western cemetery was an augmented cave, accessed by a stepped dromos. The interior contained eight niches, which the excavators called "crypts," used for the storage of bones.¹⁸ Six of these crypts

suggests that the pit and cist burials excavated at the coastal plains sites of Yavne-Yam and Azor were also Philistine (154–56); see R. Kletter and Y. Nagar, "An Iron Age Cemetery and Other Remains at Yavne," *'Atiqot* 8 (2015): 7*–21*, and S. Ben-Shlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," *Levant* 40 (2008): 47–51.

14. J. Waldbaum, "Philistine Tombs at Tell Fara and Their Aegean Prototypes," *American Journal of Archaeology* 70 (1966): 331–40; see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 47.

15. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 174–75.

16. W. H. Stiebing, "Another Look at the Origins of the Philistine Tombs at Tell el-Far'ah (S)," *American Journal of Archaeology* 74 (1970): 139–43, contra Waldbaum, "Philistine Tombs."

17. For the archaeology of Tomb 1, see R. E. Cooley and G. D. Pratico, "Dothan (the Western Cemetery)," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 374 and Cooley and Pratico, "Tell Dothan: The Western Cemetery, with Comments on Joseph Free's Excavations, 1953 to 1964," in *Preliminary Excavation Reports: Sardis, Bir Umm Fawakhir, Tell El-'Umeiri, the Combined Caesarea Expeditions, and Tell Dothan*, ed. W. G. Dever (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1994), 147–90. For the general interpretation of the tomb, see Cooley, "Gathered to His People: A Study of a Dothan Family Tomb," in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, ed. M. Tuchand and R. Youngblood (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 47–58 and Cooley and Pratico, "Gathered to His People: An Archaeological Illustration from Tell Dothan's Western Cemetery," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M. D. Coogan, C. J. Exum, and L. E. Stager (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 70–92.

18. Cooley and Pratico, "Dothan," 374 and Cooley and Pratico, "Gathered," 88–89 and 77 fig. 5–3.

were carved into the sidewalls of the chamber and are similar in form to a loculus. Each crypt was lined with a small rock wall, and two of the crypts were formed by such walls on the chamber's floor. The corpse was initially laid in the supine position in the center of the tomb where it was accompanied by grave goods. Following the primary burial, the remains of the dead together with related grave goods were secondarily placed along the sides of the chamber and inside the crypts. The history of the tomb's use is divided into five levels that begin in the LB and end in the early Iron IB.¹⁹ During this period of use the tomb became the final resting place for 250–300 people.

Tel Dothan became part of the Northern Kingdom during the Iron II period, while Tell el-Far'ah (South) was located in an area that later became part of Judah. Both sites represent Judah's peripheries. Similar burials have been discovered in the Shephelah, such as Gezer's Field I Tomb 10A, which is an LB tomb that bears affinities to Dothan Tomb 1.²⁰ These tombs show that such mortuary practices were part of a wider Bronze Age culture. The MB–LB cultural influences for Judahite mortuary practices later in the Iron II were not bound to a specific region. In fact, early bench tombs appear already in the highlands of Judah during the mid-twelfth century, although the evidence is scattered. One example is Tomb 32 at Tell en-Naşbeh (Mizpah), a site just north of Jerusalem, which was apparently a reused Bronze Age cave tomb with a bench hewn opposite the entrance.²¹ The ceramic remains from Tell en-Naşbeh suggest that Tomb 32's reuse began in the Iron IB and continued into the Iron IIA and IIB.²²

The majority of evidence for mortuary practices during the Iron IB and Iron IIA comes from the Shephelah. The cemeteries in this region that date to this period (twelfth to mid-ninth century) are found throughout the area, in the north (Gezer), the central region (Khirbet Tell el-Beidā), and the south (Tel

19. Cooley and Pratico, "Dothan," 374 and Cooley and Pratico, "Gathered," 86.

20. J. Seger, "Cultural and Historical Summary," in *Gezer V: The Field I Caves*, ed. J. Seger (Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College/Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, 1988), 47–59. Tomb 10A went out of use during the mid-fourteenth century, roughly the time that Dothan's Tomb 1 began. Both tombs were used for collective burials, and for the remains of previous interments, transferred to areas along the chamber's sides that were lined by stones.

21. C. C. McCown, *Tell en-Nasbeh, Excavated under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè* (Berkeley, CA: Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion and American Schools of Oriental Research, 1947), 77–82 and Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 177.

22. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 177; see also Bloch-Smith, "Resurrecting the Iron I Dead," 82–86.

‘Eton, Lachish, and Tel Ḥalif). At Gezer,²³ two cave tombs with loculus-like benches (Tombs 9 and 58; see fig. 3) contained remains that date to the thirteenth to tenth centuries BCE.²⁴ Each contained Philistine wares and the remains of multiple interments. In Tomb 9 (see fig. 3A), the bones of the dead were scattered on the floor.²⁵ The cave tomb layout of Tomb 58 consisted of a central chamber with three benches and two small chambers, referred to in the excavation report as cells. Although human remains were found scattered throughout the tomb, one of the chambers apparently also functioned as a repository, as evidenced by the clustering of remains inside.²⁶ Tomb 59 (see fig. 3B) dates to either the twelfth or the tenth century BCE and consists of a dromos entry into a chamber with five loculi. Most of the remains are found inside one of the loculi, again functioning as a repository.²⁷ This tomb held the remains of at least thirty people.

At the site of Khirbet Tell el-Beidā (Ḥorvat Lavnin), located in the central part of the Shephelah just south of the Elah Valley, four burial caves have been discovered dating to the LB III and Iron IIA periods.²⁸ Although the caves were not excavated, recent damage necessitated a full survey. The tombs are located along the lower slopes of the site, well below the visible remains of a wall that encircles the top of the mound.²⁹ Each is an augmented cave, and

23. The tombs discussed in this chapter were excavated by R. A. S. Macalister and published by him in *The Excavation of Gezer, 1902–1905 and 1907–1909*, 3 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1912). Additional tombs belonging to the MB–LB and the Iron Age were excavated by Raymond-Charles Weill in 1914 and 1921 and were published by A. Maeir, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tel Gezer, Israel: Finds from Raymond-Charles Weill’s Excavations in 1914 and 1921*, British Archaeological Reports International Series (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004).

24. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 175–76.

25. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 175 and Macalister, *Excavation of Gezer*, 3, pl. LXXI. According to Macalister, *Excavation of Gezer*, 1:308, the benches did not show signs of interment, as the remains were scattered on the floor.

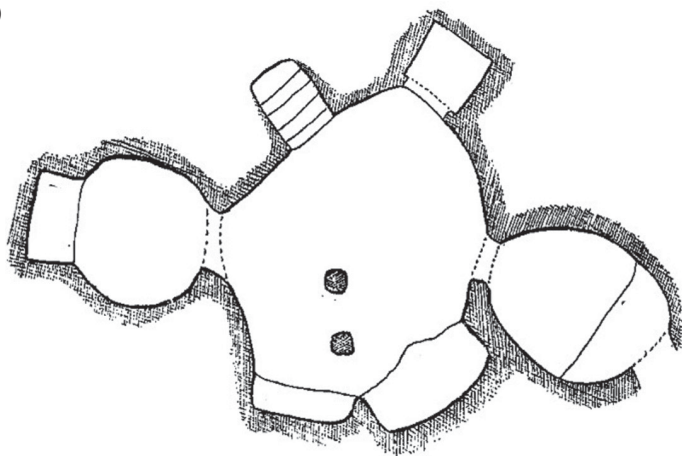
26. Meyers, “Secondary Burials,” 14, and Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 175–76. The cell that shares a wall with the entrance appears to have served as the repository; see Macalister, *Excavation of Gezer*, 1:321, 3, pl. LVI. Interestingly, Macalister’s description seems to suggest the use of vessels as repositories. He described the human remains as “partly lying loose, and partly collected into vessels,” and he notes that Tomb 59 also had bones interred inside vessels; see Macalister, *Excavation of Gezer*, 1:324, 330–31.

27. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 176 and Macalister, *Excavation of Gezer*, 1:325–31, 3, pl. LVI.

28. E. Klein and I. Shai, “Burial Caves from the Late Bronze and Iron Ages at Ḥorvat Lavnin in the Judean Shephelah,” *Tel Aviv* 43 (2016): 225–42.

29. Klein and Shai, “Burial Caves,” 225, fig. 3.

(A)



(B)

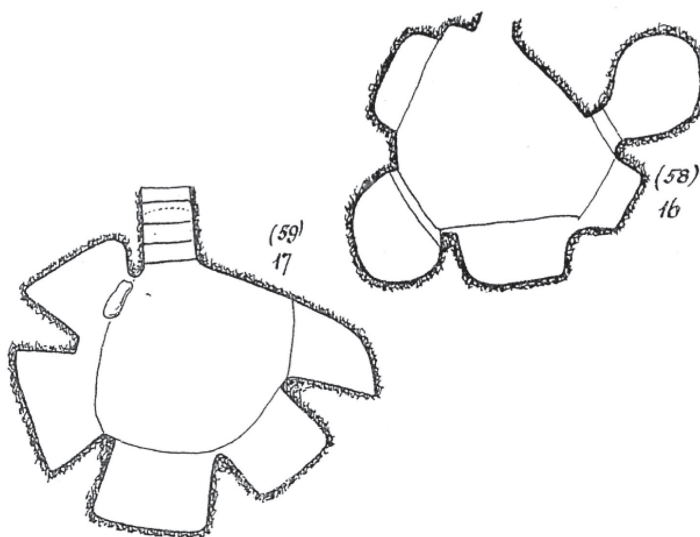


FIG. 3 Iron Age tombs at Gezer.

A. Gezer Tomb 9 (Macalister 1912, vol. 3, pl. LXXI)

B. Gezer Tombs 58–59 (Macalister 1912, vol. 3, pl. LVI)

their design follows that of a loculus tomb.³⁰ The tombs consist of a central chamber and multiple burial shelves irregularly spaced around this chamber, with the exception of Cave 2. Two tombs, Caves 1 and 3, have three and four shelves, respectively (see fig. 4), while Cave 4 has eight. Cave 2 has five

30. Klein and Shai, "Burial Caves," 225–39, figs. 4, 7, 9, and 13, respectively.

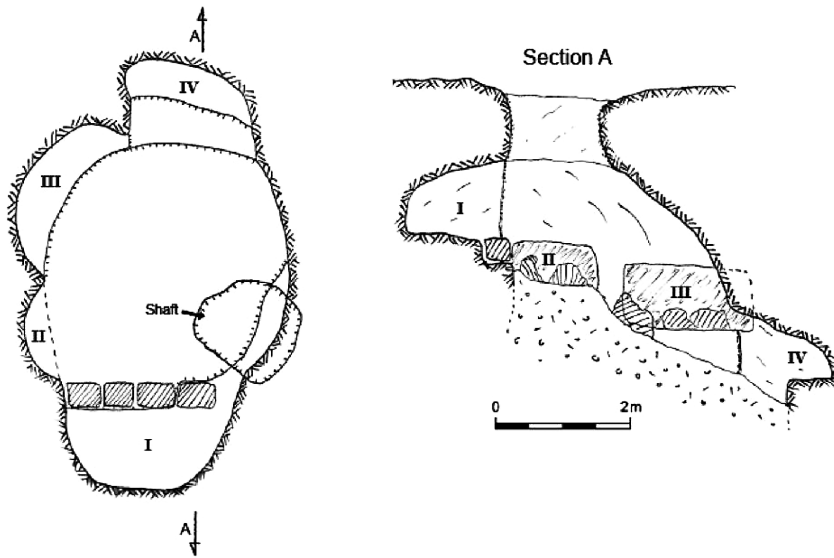


FIG. 4 Khirbet Tell el-Beidā Tomb 1 (Klein and Shai 2016, 230, fig. 4). Reprinted by permission of Itzhak Shai and the publisher, Taylor & Francis Ltd.

niches that served as burial spaces. Each burial cave was accessed from above through a ceiling shaft rather than a dromos. The survey of pottery found among the looted remains reveals that the cave tombs at Khirbet Tell el-Beidā were first used during the twelfth century (LB III) and then again in the tenth (Iron IIA). These cave tombs contained no evidence of use during the intervening eleventh century (Iron I).³¹

One of the largest burial sites in the region is found at Tel 'Eton, a site east of Lachish in the Shephelah.³² Several cemeteries surround the tell, and Cemetery C on the southwest side includes three tombs that date to the Iron I and Iron IIA periods (C1, C2, and C3). Tomb C1 is the earliest among these

31. Moreover, unlike the roughly contemporary tombs at Gezer and Tel 'Eton, there were no Philistine remains found in the Khirbet Tell el-Beidā tombs; see Klein and Shai, "Burial Caves," 239–41. As the published report cautions, however, the survey results are preliminary and inconclusive.

32. The following description is based on A. Faust, "The 'Philistine Tomb' at Tel 'Eton: Cultural Contact, Colonialism, and Local Response in Iron Age Shephelah, Israel," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 71 (2015): 195–230. See also the earlier salvage excavations by D. Ussishkin, "Tombs from the Israelite Period at Tel 'Eton," *Tel Aviv* 1 (1974): 109–27 and the history of the research at this important Iron Age cemetery in Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 173–81. The extensive remains of this cemetery are currently being studied by Avraham Faust as part of his ongoing excavation of the site.

burials, dating to the twelfth to eleventh centuries BCE.³³ It consists of a rectangular chamber accessed from a stepped side entrance and divided into two subchambers (situated northwest and southeast). The entrance to the tomb is on the northern side of the northwestern subchamber, opposite two loculus-type benches. The southeastern half of the chamber contains three similar benches (the two on the southern side are connected and shelf-like) and a repository in the center of the subchamber. Remains of seven individuals were interred inside Tomb C₁, and the pottery included Philistine bichrome ware along with collared rim jars.³⁴ Tomb C₃, although robbed, included scattered skeletal remains and a large assemblage of pottery typical of the Iron IIA.³⁵

The tombs at Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) constitute an interesting data set for our study of Judahite mortuary practices.³⁶ Three Iron II cemeteries containing variant forms of burial have been discovered at the site, two along its northwest slopes (Cemeteries 100 and 200) and one to the southwest (Cemetery 500).³⁷ These burials include individual graves, which are rare in Iron II Judah,³⁸ as well as collective tombs. The collective tombs include several earlier second-millennium (MB–LB) tombs that were reused. This reuse

33. The earliest burial unit at Tel 'Eton is a LB tomb on the west side of the mound in Area B, an adapted cave tomb that bears similarities to the later tombs at the site; see Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 176. Tomb C₁ thus forms a bridge between this earlier LB tomb and the subsequent Iron IIA burials.

34. The description is based on Faust, "'Philistine Tomb,'" 202–8; see also B. Arensburg and A. Belfer-Cohen, "Human Remains from Tomb C₁ at Tell 'Eitun," *'Atiqot* 21 (1992): 45–48.

35. H. Katz and A. Faust, "The Chronology of the Iron Age IIA in Judah in the Light of Tel 'Eton Tomb C₃ and Other Assemblages," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 371 (2014): 103–27.

36. O. Tufnell, *Lachish III (Tell ed Duweir): The Iron Age*, Wellcome Archaeological Research Expedition to the Near East Publications (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 169–254.

37. See the map in L. Singer-Avitz, "The Middle Bronze Age Cemetery," in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, ed. D. Ussishkin (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004), 972, fig. 171. In her review of Tufnell's published pottery, O. Zimhoni, "The Pottery of Levels V and IV and Its Archaeological and Chronological Implications," in Ussishkin, *Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, 1695 also notes that the majority of Iron Age tombs date to Lachish Levels V–IV, which would place them in the late tenth to early eighth centuries. This large percentage of tombs (60 percent) contrasts with the small number of Level III tombs (ca. 10 percent), which may be due to the brief history of this stratum, limited to the second half of the eighth century.

38. Although single burials are found in Judah, they are relatively rare outside of the Silwan cemetery at Jerusalem. The individual burials at Lachish date mainly to the ninth century, and this burial custom resumes in a more limited capacity during the late seventh century.

of earlier tombs—specifically, loculus tombs—coincides with the creation of rudimentary bench tombs at the site.

Lachish Tomb 521 has a single bench that held the skeletal remains of two people and the remains of two other individuals were found on the floor next to the bench, suggesting that they were displaced to make room on the bench.³⁹ This tomb is the earliest of the excavated Iron Age burials at Lachish, dating to the second quarter of the tenth century.⁴⁰ Tomb 6006 is a rock-cut chamber that consists of two benches along the walls, one to the right and one opposite the stepped-dromos entry. Excavation of this tomb revealed two burials along with ceramic remains that date to the early ninth century. Tomb 116 was a rock-cut tomb with a rectangular chamber and three benches.⁴¹ The construction of this tomb is dated to the first half of the ninth century, but it was reused as a charnel room during the seventh century. These tombs (521, 6006, and 116) represent the early stages of the rock-cut bench tomb at Lachish.

At Lachish during the Iron IIA (and continuing into the Iron IIB) we see the reuse of second-millennium BCE tombs for collective interment.⁴² Tomb 218 consists of two carved chambers, rounded in shape, with a repository cut into the wall of the second (Room A). The repository may be secondary; inside it, the excavators discovered human remains along with pottery that dates to the MB-LB.⁴³ The remains inside the two chambers span Lachish Level IV, which possibly begins in the late tenth century and continues into the eighth

39. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 222.

40. While Zimhoni, "Pottery," 1697–98 found it difficult to establish a more secure date for Tomb 521, Katz and Faust, "Chronology," 114 date it to the early Iron IIA and suggest that it was earlier than Tel 'Eton Tomb C3. Several bowls and jugs were clustered around the heads of the primary burials placed on the benches; see Tufnell, *Lachish III*, pl. 8, nos. 1–2. The chamber's floor had four storage jars. This tomb is discussed also in R. Schmitt, "Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family," in *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*, ed. R. Albertz and R. Schmitt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 440.

41. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 190; although there is no drawing, see the picture on pl. 4, no. 2. See also the description of this tomb in Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 206. Zimhoni, "Pottery," 1699 discusses the pottery from this tomb only within the context of Level IV, which confirms Tufnell's ninth-century dating.

42. In addition to the tombs reviewed below, Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 249 also describes 6011 as a "cave in Grid Square 4.5" originally augmented in the Early Bronze Age and reused in the tenth century for burials. At least two burials were recoverable.

43. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 203–5, also says that Tomb 230 was probably a MB bilobate tomb (212), although no details are given in the individual entry for this tomb (218).

century with some Level III objects.⁴⁴ The tomb was thus used for an extended period during the Iron II once the earlier remains from the second millennium were cleared. The use of MB (and LB) loculus tombs during this phase (Iron IIA) is evident in the partially destroyed remains of Tomb 4002.⁴⁵ The plan of Tomb 4005 also resembles that of an MB tomb, although no remains from the MB period were discovered inside. The tomb actually contained few ceramic remains in relation to the large number of burials (fifty or more), and these remains date to the Iron IIA.⁴⁶ The plan of Tomb 4005 is a cave with three loculus-type benches carved into the walls opposite the stepped entrance (see fig. 5).⁴⁷ Tomb 223 apparently originated in the LB period, based on the earliest ceramic remains.⁴⁸ It consisted of a stepped entry leading to three chambers. Like Tomb 521, it was reused in the Iron IIA, and a repository was carved into the wall of the innermost chamber (Room B).⁴⁹

Finally, a series of tombs at Tel Ḥalif (located south of Tel 'Eton and Lachish) spans the Iron II period. Though most bear the typical form of a bench tomb seen in eighth- to seventh-century burials,⁵⁰ among them are two tombs that were used as early as the Iron IIA. The first, Tomb 3 of Site 72,⁵¹ has the squared shape that becomes standard by the Iron IIIA, with three benches on the walls opposite the entrance and two repositories. The other tomb stands out because its main chamber is rounded, or globular, in shape with a single shelf-like bench opposite the stepped entrance and a large repository carved at the end of the bench into the sidewall.⁵² The tomb was undisturbed, its entrance blocked by a stone, and the contents of its repository,

44. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 203–4; see also Zimhoni, “Pottery,” 1699. According to Katz and Faust, “Chronology,” 114, Lachish Tomb 218 is contemporary with Tel 'Eton Tomb C3.

45. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 239–40, in particular the plan on 240, fig. 29. Two primary burials were discovered inside.

46. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 240–41.

47. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 241, fig. 29.

48. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 211–14.

49. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 212, fig. 27. Zimhoni, “Pottery,” 1698 suggested that the pottery assemblage from Tomb 223 belongs to the later phase of Level IV, dated to the early eighth century.

50. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 202–3.

51. O. Borowski, *Lahav III: The Iron Age II Cemetery at Tell Ḥalif (Site 72)*, ed. J. Seger (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

52. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 202–3 and A. Biran and R. Gophna, “An Iron Age Burial Cave at Tel Ḥalif,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970): 151–68.

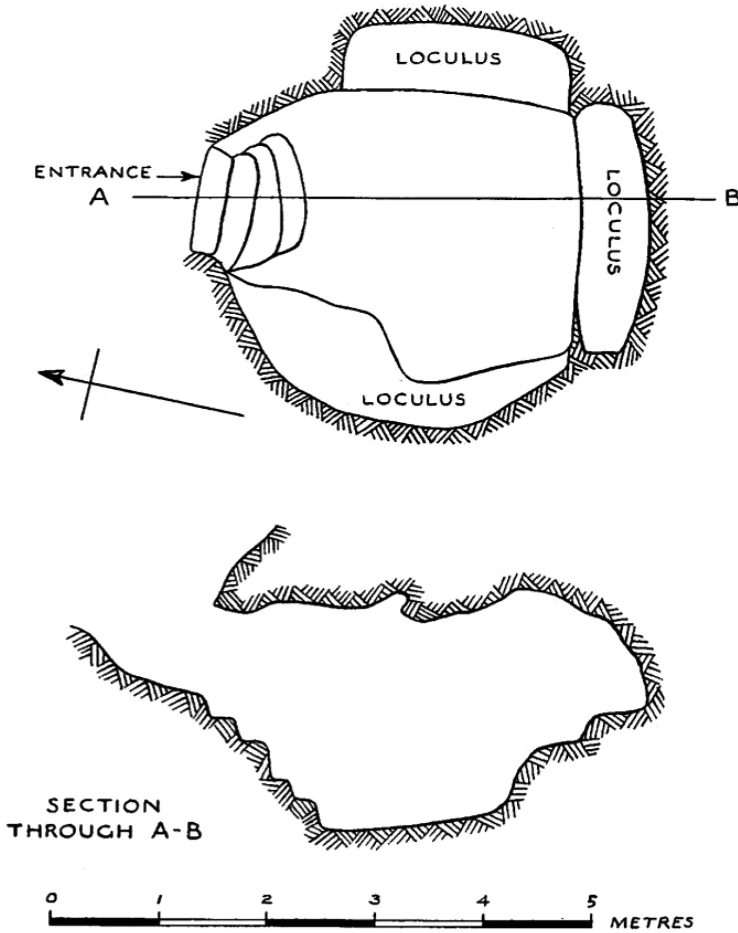


FIG. 5 Lachish Tomb 4005 (Tufnell 1953, 241, fig. 29). Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

which was filled, date to the tenth or early ninth century and into the eighth century, while the remains on the bench and on the chamber floor date to the ninth to eighth centuries.⁵³

The Second Phase: Iron Age IIB

The use of rock-cut bench tombs becomes more popular by the late ninth century, and this popularity increases dramatically during the eighth century

53. Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 167–68.

BCE. Not only does this tomb type increase in number and its geographic distribution spread throughout Judah, it also begins to take on a more fixed form. Some variability can certainly be observed,⁵⁴ but the general trend toward a standardized form is evident in the predominance of artificially created rock-cut tombs over adapted caves. In fact, the use of both types can occur in the same cemetery, often showing continuity from the first phase (Iron IIA) into this second phase, the late ninth century until the end of the eighth century (Iron IIB). For example, in the central highlands at Tell en-Naşbeh, two tombs (T.54 and T.5) were used continually during this period (see fig. 6A and B).⁵⁵ One (T.54) is a cave tomb with a bench and loculus-like cell carved opposite the stepped entrance; the other (T.5) has three benches surrounding a rectangular chamber. At least two other tombs probably belonged to this group. The first is T.14, which included two chambers with multiple benches.⁵⁶ The second is a tomb (T.3, see fig. 6C) discovered roughly half a kilometer north of Tell en-Naşbeh that has a square plan with a small repository and three benches.⁵⁷

One of the more extensive cemeteries during this period is found at Beth-Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh). Several tombs were cut into the north-western side of Beth-Shemesh, outside of the settled area, along the slopes of the mound that descend into the Sorek Valley. Most of the tombs date to the eighth century BCE and display a deliberate plan with straight-angle corners and squared or rectangular chambers that incorporate benches.⁵⁸ A remarkable series of tombs in this cemetery are interconnected through a stepped

54. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 41–52 and 249, fig. 10; see also I. Yezerski, “Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah,” *Tel Aviv* 26 (1999): 254–57.

55. McCown, *Tell en-Nasbeh*, 82–84; Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 207; and Schmitt, “Care,” 440 and 443, fig. 7.3.

56. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 207.

57. McCown, *Tell en-Nasbeh*, 102, 104. The tomb was reused during the Hellenistic period, so its Iron Age remains were disturbed. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 207 includes it with the other Tell en-Naşbeh tombs that span the Iron II.

58. D. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems (Beth-Shemesh)* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1913). See also Schmitt, “Care,” 448, who cites the pottery analysis of Tombs 2, 7, and 8 by R. Wenning, “‘Medien’ in der Bestattungskultur im eisenzeitlichen Juda?,” in *Medien im antiken Palästina: Materielle Kommunikation und Medialität als Thema der Palästinaarchäologie*, ed. C. Frevel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 130–31.

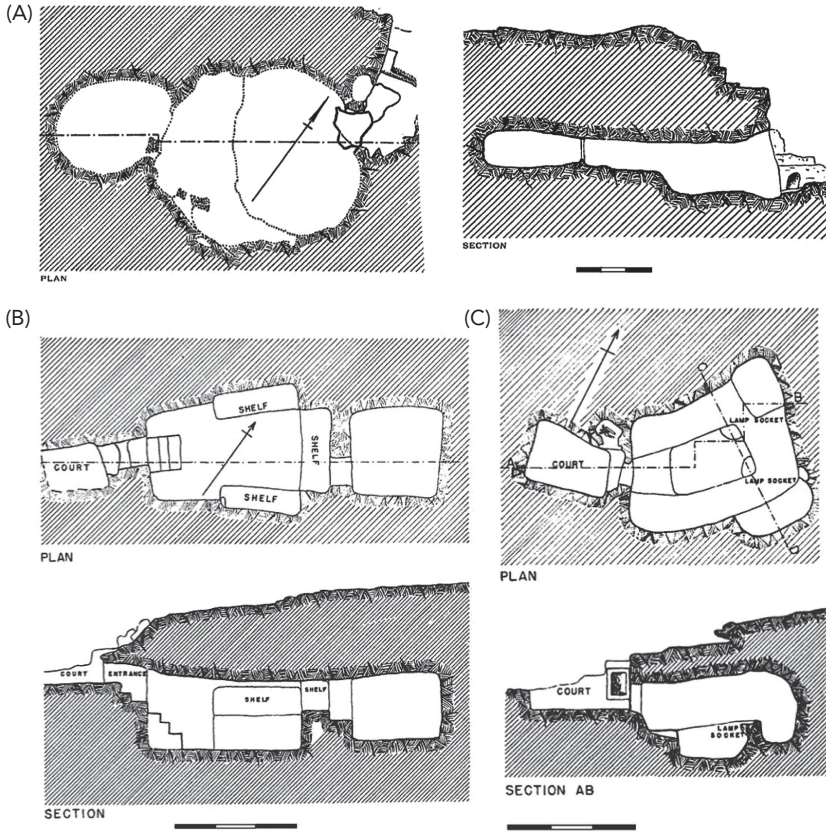


FIG. 6 Iron Age tombs from Tell en-Naşbeh/Mizpah. Images courtesy of the Bade Museum, Pacific School of Religion.

A. Tomb 54 (McCown 1947, 81, fig. 7)

B. Tomb 5 (McCown 1947, 84, fig. 8)

C. Tomb 3 (McCown 1947, 102 fig. 11)

corridor that provides central access to four chamber tombs, one of which leads to a fifth (see fig. 7A).⁵⁹ Tombs 5 and 8 have a square chamber with benches carved into the three walls opposite the entrance.⁶⁰ A carved space

59. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 73–92, pls. VII–X.

60. Among the grave goods in Tomb 8 were two small finds bearing Hebrew inscriptions; see Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 87–88, 91–92. One was a bowl, of a type known from the eighth century, with אַחֶיךָ ‘your brother’ inscribed on its exterior surface; see G. Barkay, “‘Your Poor Brother’ a Note on an Inscribed Bowl from Beth Shemesh,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 41 (1991): 239–41. This artifact is discussed further in chapter 4. The

in the northeast corner of Tomb 8 (fig. 7B) where two of the benches meet served as a repository.⁶¹ Tomb 2 (fig. 7C), which is outside of this complex, shares a similar square plan.⁶² Although the ceramic remains from this cemetery predominantly date to the eighth century, a few of the tombs include scattered pieces from the seventh. This suggests that the cemetery at Beth-Shemesh continued in use after the site was destroyed at the end of the eighth century.⁶³

Tel 'Eton contains several eighth-century tombs, which generally fall into three groups.⁶⁴ The first is a continuation of the loculus style seen in the earlier tombs. In this design, a rectangular central chamber contains five loculus-type benches, two on each side adjacent to the entrance and one on the far end.⁶⁵ The second are variations of multichamber designs, often with a repository in the place of the bench at the far end of one of the chambers.⁶⁶ The third type follows the more typical design during Iron IIB. Though the architectural style varies, each group is built to facilitate the type of secondary burials that were common to Judahite mortuary culture, containing benches (including loculi) and repositories. The available evidence suggests that the cemeteries ceased at the end of the eighth century, when the site was destroyed (probably in 701 BCE).⁶⁷

other inscription is a scaraboid seal with the inscription לֹאֲחָאָב בְּעֻדָּאֵל, with the two words divided between an upper and lower register. Inscribed seals such as this one are typical in Judah during the late eighth century and continue into the seventh.

61. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 84–85. Note also that Tomb 8 had a large storage jar sitting at the end of one bench next to the stepped entry; beside it, on the second step, were seven oil lamps. It is unclear if this storage jar served any collection purpose, but it was positioned next to an opening that connected with a pit carved into the side of Tomb 7.

62. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 64–69, pl. V. This tomb has a pit carved into the southeastern section at the corner where two benches meet, which was apparently the repository.

63. Yezerski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah," 258.

64. Ussishkin, "Tombs," 109–27 and Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 178–79. Seven tombs from this period have been published. As Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 178, fig. 6, note, Tomb A1 is anomalous. It is an adapted cave tomb with two loculi.

65. See Tombs 1–4, published by Ussishkin, "Tombs," 109–17, figs. 2–3, 5–7 and dealt with in Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 178.

66. This group includes Tomb A2, for which see Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 178–79, fig. 7, as well as a tomb in the southern cemetery, for which see Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 180, fig. 8 and S. Ganor, A. Ganor, and R. Kehati, "An Iron Age II Burial Cave in the Southern Burial Ground at Tel 'Eton," *Atiqot* 73 (2013): 2* (Hebrew). The repositories can be large carved spaces or small pits.

67. Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery," 179–80.

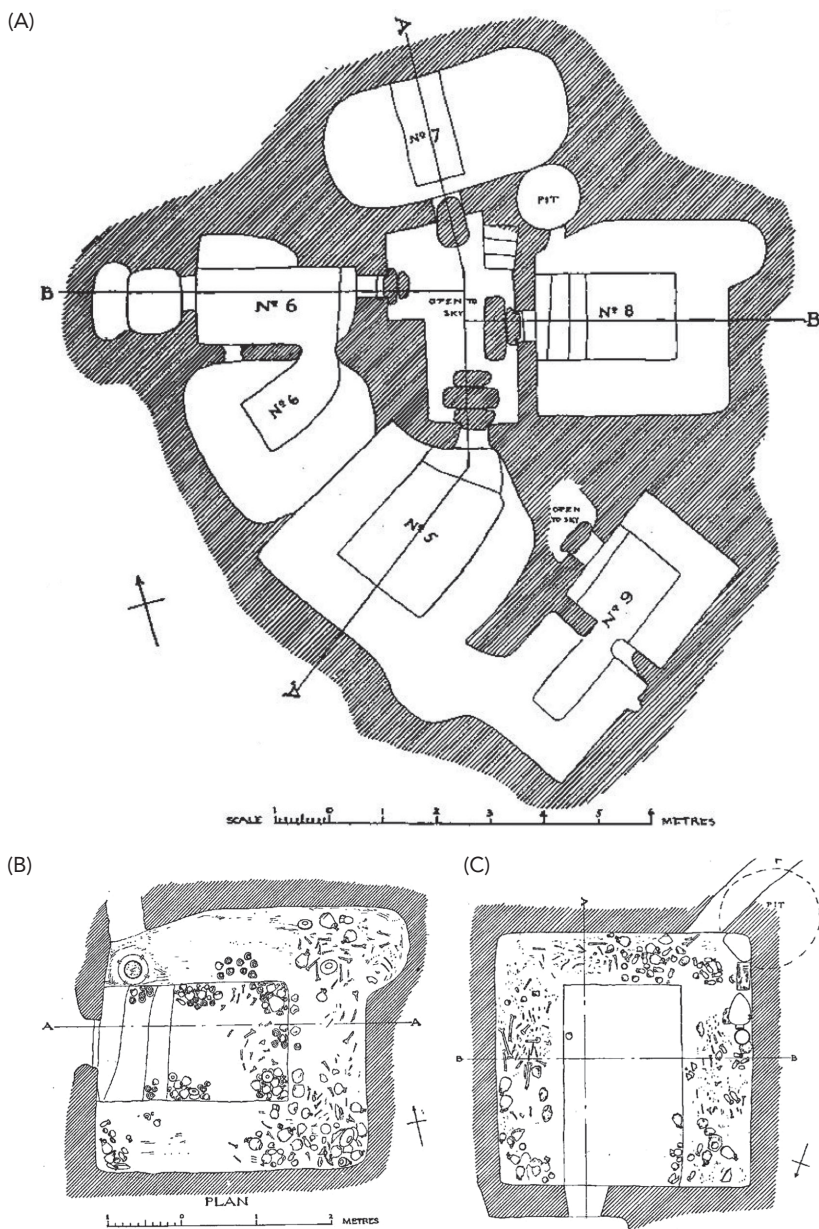


FIG. 7 Eighth-century tombs at Beth-Shemesh.

A. Tomb Complex (Mackenzie 1913, pl. VII)

B. Tomb 8 (Mackenzie 1913, pl. X)

C. Tomb 2 (Mackenzie 1913, pl. V)

Near Tel 'Eton, three tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim date to the Iron IIB (ninth to eighth centuries BCE): Tombs 4, 5, and 6.⁶⁸ In Tombs 5 and 6, a small rectangular entrance leads to a burial chamber. In Tomb 5, the chamber is rectangular with a bench at the far end, opposite the entrance.⁶⁹ The bench has a pit carved on one end that apparently served as a repository. Two small pits carved in the floor, flanking either side of the entrance, were discovered with pottery. Tomb 6 had an irregularly shaped rectangular chamber with loculus-type benches carved into the three walls opposite the entrance.⁷⁰ Tomb 4 is a well-executed design with a rectangular chamber leading to three smaller chambers that are also carved at right angles.⁷¹ The smaller chambers occupy each wall opposite the entrance and have a slightly elevated floor that creates a shelf-like surface separate from the central chamber. The tombs were disturbed and partly robbed, but they held multiple burials; scattered skeletal remains were found in each. The pottery in Tombs 5 and 6 dates from the ninth to eighth centuries.⁷² In Tomb 4, the ceramic remains date mainly to the eighth century.⁷³ Each tomb contains a small number of pottery types that date to the seventh century BCE. This suggests that the tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim, like those at Beth-Shemesh, continued to be used, albeit in a limited manner, after the site was destroyed at the end of the eighth century (consistent with Stratum A).⁷⁴

A few kilometers south and west of Tell Beit Mirsim a cemetery of almost fifty tombs was discovered at Ḥorbat Za'aq.⁷⁵ The tombs generally date to mid-Iron IIB, with a few tombs dating to the early Iron IIIA. A study of eleven tombs at the site suggests that Ḥorbat Za'aq's cemetery began around the second quarter of the eighth century and continued until the end of that

68. S. Ben-Arieh et al., "The Tombs," in *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, ed. S. Ben-Arieh, IAA Reports (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 2. A fourth tomb (101) is also listed among the Iron II remains, but it is simply a cave burial without any worked features such as a dromos, a bench, or a repository.

69. Ben-Arieh et al., "Tombs," 8–9, and 9, plan 1.11.

70. Ben-Arieh et al., "Tombs," 9, plan 1.12.

71. Ben-Arieh et al., "Tombs," 8, plan 1.10.

72. S. Ben-Arieh, "Grave Goods and Chronology," in Ben-Arieh, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, 31–32.

73. Ben-Arieh, "Grave Goods," 30.

74. Ben-Arieh, "Grave Goods," 30–32; S. Ben-Arieh, "The Tombs in Relation to the Occupation on the Mound," in Ben-Arieh, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, 208–10.

75. I. Yezereski, "The Burial Ground at Ḥorbat Za'aq," *'Atiqot* 76 (2013): 1–23 and I. Yezereski and P. Nahshoni, "The Finds from the Ḥorbat Za'aq Burial Ground," *'Atiqot* 76 (2013): 72–98.

century.⁷⁶ Five of the eleven tombs continued to be used at the beginning of the seventh century but to a limited extent.⁷⁷ Although it is unclear where the associated settlement was located,⁷⁸ it is estimated that as many as forty families used this cemetery.⁷⁹ With one exception (Tomb 20), most of the tombs have a rounded rather than a squared plan. Some of the tombs are adapted caves, and the benches were loculus-type niches with pit repositories. These factors, along with the quality of the architecture, may indicate a nonelite status,⁸⁰ when compared, for instance, to the more finely built and elaborate contemporaneous tombs at Beth-Shemesh. It is difficult to establish rank and status among mortuary remains, however, and the architectural style may also suggest the adoption of older traditions similar to tombs found nearby at Tel 'Eton and Lachish, as well as the Negev site of Tel 'Ira.⁸¹

At Tel Ḥalif, at least twenty-five Iron II tombs have been investigated at the Site 72 cemetery.⁸² This cemetery is located southwest of the mound on an embankment across a small valley. Of the tombs, eight display a similar design, with a squared chamber (comparable to Beth-Shemesh Tomb 8) and with three benches on each wall opposite the entrance and two repositories carved out of the corners (again, opposite the entrance).⁸³ The entrances, or

76. Yezereski and Nahshoni, "Finds," 65–66, listing Tombs 5, 9, 10, 18–20, and 22. Tomb 21 is dated to the late eighth century. For these tombs, see Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 2–15. Although the grave goods are scattered among the damaged and pilfered tombs, the date is established according to the chronology of Lachish Levels IV and III and the absence of hand-burnished red slip wares.

77. Tombs 6, 17, and 23–25; see Yezereski and Nahshoni, "Finds," 65–66 and Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 3–4, 6, 15–18. The decline is attributed to the Assyrian crisis of 701 BCE; Yezereski and Nahshoni draw parallels with Tell Beit Mirsim.

78. The Iron II village may have been located in the area of the Arab village, abandoned in recent times; see Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 1. Another, albeit speculative, possibility is that the cemetery represents a conglomerate of families from local farmsteads.

79. Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 20.

80. Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 22 states: "it can be concluded that a rural population with modest economic resources was buried here." Tomb 20 is the exception. It is difficult to dispute this conclusion despite the caution necessary in assigning rank to mortuary remains.

81. See specifically Lachish Tomb 4005 and Tel 'Ira T-3 and T-4. In fact, Yezereski, "Burial Ground," 22 raises the possibility that the tombs represent either the continuity between the LB and the Iron II–III or the adoption of LB burial customs.

82. Borowski, *Lahav III*, 1–9.

83. Borowski, *Lahav III*, 10–67. The eight tombs include numbers 1–4, 6, 8, 17, and 20. Per the excavators, Tomb 3 dates as early as the tenth century, which would indicate that this specific architectural style was adopted (or introduced) early in the Iron II period before becoming more popular in later centuries.

forecourts, were also well planned and typically included two or three steps descending into the chamber. Three of the tombs include an antechamber with a single side chamber that was rounded at the corners, or globular in shape, with a repository cut into the wall.⁸⁴ This type of repository differs from the other tombs, where they were dug into the benches. In each case of a tomb with a repository cut into a wall, the tomb had a single bench, which suggested to the excavators that the repositories may have been added secondarily in order to adapt a single-occupancy tomb for collective burial. As noted, one of the single-bench tombs was in use from the tenth to eighth centuries and contained the remains of multiple individuals.⁸⁵

The furthest south the bench tomb occurs is the site of Tel 'Ira in the Negev.⁸⁶ The cemetery there was situated on the lower portion of the mound's eastern slopes.⁸⁷ The excavators noted the presence of at least thirty tombs in this general area and excavated ten.⁸⁸ Of the excavated tombs, T-15 is the earliest, dating to the ninth to eighth centuries BCE.⁸⁹ This tomb is entered through a stepped dromos and contains three chambers with five benches total. One of the chambers (Locus 120) contains a small repository, which is an otherwise rare feature at the cemetery of Tel 'Ira.⁹⁰ Tomb 5 is also an early burial, dating to the eighth century, with two interconnected rectangular chambers that contain three benches total.⁹¹ The single bench of the innermost chamber (116) has a carved pillow at one end.⁹² Chamber 116 contained the disarticulated

84. Borowski, *Lahav III*, 47–56. These tombs include Tomb 16, which had a central chamber as well as the burial chamber (47, fig. 3.43); Tomb 18 (54, fig. 3.50); and the tomb excavated by Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 154–55, figs. 2–3.

85. Biran and Gophna, "Iron Age Burial Cave," 152 describe two skeletons on the bench, pieces of five skulls collected on the floor with grave goods, and a full repository with bones.

86. I. Beit-Arie and A. G. Baron, "The Cemetery," in *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev*, ed. I. Beit-Arie (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 167 and Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 203.

87. Beit-Arie and Baron, "Cemetery," 129 and 10, fig. 2.1.

88. Beit-Arie and Baron, "Cemetery," 129–30.

89. Beit-Arie and Baron, "Cemetery," 151–59.

90. Beit-Arie and Baron, "Cemetery," 167, state that only two tombs have repositories (presumably T-9 and T-16) but that a hollowed niche (Locus 120) in T-15 contained bones and thus served as a type of repository. Otherwise, the practice in the Tel 'Ira cemetery was to collect bones in a corner of the chamber, as seen in T-3, T-4, and T-23.

91. Beit-Arie and Baron, "Cemetery," 139–41; for the plan, see 139, fig. 4.12.

92. Chamber 118, heavily damaged, also may have had pillowed benches; see 140.

remains of several burials, including five skulls. Tombs 3 and 4 have a similar plan, consisting of a rectangular dromos entry with several steps connecting to an oblong chamber with loculus-type benches and arched niches in the three walls facing the entrance.⁹³ The architectural plan is similar to Lachish Tomb 4005, which is a reused MB tomb. The Tel 'Ira tombs, however, were constructed during the Iron II period, with the pottery in Tomb 4 dating to the eighth to seventh centuries BCE, spanning the late Iron IIB and early Iron IIIA. Thus the cemetery at Tel 'Ira includes multiple architectural traditions, including tombs with squared dimensions similar to Beth-Shemesh (T-5, T-14, and T-15), Jerusalem, and other sites during the Iron IIB–IIIA.

The Third Phase: Iron Age IIIA

The phases proposed in this chapter overlap considerably. This is most evident in the Iron IIB and Iron IIIA periods as seen at Tel 'Ira. The mortuary practices that become popular in the Iron IIB continue into the Iron IIIA and take on new characteristics. One of the distinguishing features of the third phase is the appearance of writing on tombs, which will be discussed separately in the next chapter. It also becomes more common during this period to see tombs incorporating additional features such as a parapet lining the side of the bench or carved niches at the end of the bench serving as headrests. Distribution of the bench tomb also changes during the seventh century. This last factor should be related to the historical circumstances of the kingdom of Judah in the wake of the late eighth century's Assyrian crisis. Following the destructive events of Sennacherib's third campaign in 701 BCE, certain patterns emerge in Judahite cemeteries. In the Shephelah, at Beth-Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, and presumably Ḥorbat Za'aq, the cemeteries continued to be used after the site was destroyed, albeit in a much more limited manner. At other sites such as Khirbet Beit Lei and Lachish, new tombs are constructed as part of the efforts to rebuild the Shephelah. A third phenomenon is the redevelopment of cemeteries, such as those at Gibeon, Tel 'Ira, and possibly Gezer.⁹⁴

93. Beit-Arieh and Baron, "Cemetery," 132–38; for the plans, see 13, fig. 4.3 (T-3), and 135, fig. 4.6 (T-4). T-16 has a similar style, with a rectangular stepped dromos and arched niches for benches, but it was emptied in antiquity and can be dated only roughly to Iron II; see 160–61 and fig. 4.39.

94. Aren Maeir noted the abundance of Iron Age pottery from the tombs Weill had excavated and suggested that they belong to the latter part of the seventh century following the decline of Assyrian power. In this scenario, the earlier LB–Iron I tombs located at Gezer are reused

At Gibeon, thirteen tombs were surveyed that have been dated to the Iron IIIA based on their architectural style.⁹⁵ The tombs are single chamber, containing either two or three benches, and most have repositories.⁹⁶ Two of them (Tombs 4 and 8) are laid out as a squared chamber with a repository and three benches with carved headrests and parapets.⁹⁷ This plan is similar to the chambers of Burial Cave 24 at Ketef Hinnom. Tombs 13 and 14 also have three benches, but one of the benches is a trough with a headrest.⁹⁸ Tombs 2 and 7 are squared chambers with two benches on the parallel walls adjacent to the entrance, similar to Lachish Tomb 109 (see fig. 8B).⁹⁹

Two tombs were discovered at the site of Khirbet Beit Lei, northeast of Lachish, one of which was undisturbed.¹⁰⁰ The undisturbed tomb (Tomb 1) contained a series of Hebrew inscriptions, which will be discussed in chapters 3 and 5. The tomb is also unusual because its burial chambers were discovered in a pristine state, the remains of primary interments still recumbent upon the tomb's benches. But the tomb did not include any pottery; the only finds were a few metal ornaments that probably adorned the bodies.¹⁰¹ The tomb consisted of a rectangular central chamber,

in late Iron IIIA when the site returns to Judahite control. See A. Maeir, "Summary," in *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tel Gezer, Israel: Finds from Raymond-Charles Weill's Excavations in 1914 and 1921*, ed. A. Maeir (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), 62–63.

95. H. Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," *Israel Exploration Journal* 37 (1987): 1–3. A. K. Dajani, "An Iron Age Tomb at Al-Jib," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 2 (1953): 66–74 had earlier excavated Tomb 11 (according to Eshel's numbering), but the rest of the tombs were already cleared, and some have been repurposed by the modern populace at Al Jib.

96. No repository was found in Tomb 3, which appears to be a single occupancy tomb, given its size and lone bench; see Eshel, "Late Iron Age Cemetery," 5–6, 14–15, and 5, fig. 4. Tomb 10 does not seem to contain a repository, although this may be due to its damaged state. Tomb 7 has an irregularly arched niche opposite the entrance and adjacent to the two parallel benches. This niche may have served as the repository; see 8–9, fig. 8.

97. Eshel, "Late Iron Age Cemetery," 6, fig. 5, and 9, fig. 9. Tombs 13 and 14 (12–13, figs. 13–14) each contains a single headrest, though they have multiple benches.

98. Eshel, "Late Iron Age Cemetery," 12–13, figs. 13–14.

99. Eshel, "Late Iron Age Cemetery," 4, 8–9, figs. 3 and 8; see also Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 189.

100. J. Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963): 74–92. See also Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 230 and A. Mandell and J. D. Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16 (2016): 192–245.

101. Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 75–76 (see fig. 2). A few pieces of pottery that date to the Persian period were discovered near the tomb's entrance.

accessed through a stepped dromos and two side chambers, to the left of the entrance and facing the entrance.¹⁰² Each chamber consisted of three shelf-like benches carved into the walls adjacent to the entrance, but without repositories. A third chamber was planned on the right side of the central chamber, evident in the carved outline of an entrance.¹⁰³ The outline was carved over one inscription, indicating that the tomb was still in the process of construction when the walls were inscribed.¹⁰⁴ The paleography suggests a seventh-century date for the tomb, although its plan is typical of the Iron IIB–IIIA in general.¹⁰⁵

The complete absence of grave goods inside Tomb 1 warrants further explanation. To begin with, it does not support the common interpretation of the inscriptions as graffiti left behind by refugees. This theory rejects the interpretation of Tomb 1's inscriptions as funerary, seeing them instead as prayers invoking the Israelite deity to protect those hiding inside the cave from their enemies—either the Assyrians or Babylonians, depending on when the tomb is dated. But the writing is consistent with general themes found in funerary epitaphs (discussed in chapter 3). Furthermore, it would be surprising if refugees hid inside a cave without leaving behind any material traces. At the very least one would expect to find a few scattered remains of pottery, such as drinking vessels. A better explanation is that Tomb 1 was partially

102. Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 74–75; see the floor plan and isometric drawing in figs. 1 and 3, respectively.

103. Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 80–81.

104. Mandell and Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function," 215 n. 56. Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 407 offers a multiphase interpretation. He suggests that the tomb was used for purposes other than burial after it was built. The inscriptions and iconography belong to this second phase of use. The tomb was then reused for burial and sealed shut. Zevit's scenario is plausible, and his analysis of the tomb's ritual space is invaluable. But the use of a burial cave for religious rituals would be unusual even if the tomb did not contain any remains of the dead. The purpose of the rituals is also not entirely clear. A single-phase interpretation that sees the tomb as incomplete and used only for primary burials avoids these problems.

105. For this date, see J. Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 197–98. F. M. Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. J. A. Sanders (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 299–306 dated the script to the sixth century. The translation found in this book, however, follows that of Lemaire. For the date of the tomb, see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 230. Note that neither Naveh nor Cross thought that the inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei were funerary, which runs counter to the interpretation I offer here.

used and left unfinished with incomplete burials.¹⁰⁶ That explanation begins with the fact that Tomb 1 contains primary burials but no secondary remains. Added to this is the complete absence of grave goods, save a few ornamental pieces, along with the tracings that indicate planned expansion. It is possible that repositories were to be added later during the secondary burial of those already interred, which never occurred.¹⁰⁷ Although there is no evident reason why the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb was abandoned, one historical explanation is that the tomb was constructed as part of the furtive efforts of Judah to repopulate the Shephelah during the late Iron IIIA. But Judah's efforts to control this area faded in the late seventh century and early sixth century, beginning with the Babylonian incursions into the southern Levant following their victory at Carchemish in 605, and culminating with Jerusalem's destruction in 586. These events would have led to the abandonment of Tomb 1 at Khirbet Beit Lei after a brief period of use.

The historical explanation given for the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb finds some support at Lachish, located a few kilometers to the south. Cemetery 100 at Lachish has two stages in the Iron IIIA: the first during the seventh century and the second during the late seventh to sixth centuries. The first stage postdates the Assyrian destruction of Lachish Level III and includes evidence of mass interments.¹⁰⁸ The second stage postdates the mass burials and is dated to Lachish Level II, when the site was rebuilt as a small fortress.

A mass burial in Tomb 120, which contained the remains of up to 1,500 people, marks the first stage.¹⁰⁹ During this stage, two MB bilobate chamber tombs (Tombs 107 and 108) were reused for mass burials.¹¹⁰ Tomb 116, a bench

106. The term *lifecycle* can be applied to bench tombs in much the same way that A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, "The Four Room House: Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 26 use it to describe the phases of a multigenerational dwelling. This use differs from that of L. Meskell, "Cycles of Life and Death: Narrative Homology and Archaeological Realities," *World Archaeology* 31 (2000): 423–41, who applies the term to the biography of the body, though it is similar in that her use focuses on the history of the subject, whether tomb or individual.

107. The secondary addition of a repository is seen in Tombs 218 and 223 at Lachish and is a possible explanation for the internal plan of Tombs 16 and 18 at Tel Hālif.

108. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 193–96.

109. Tufnell, *Lachish III*. The tomb was constructed during the LB period and was used in some capacity during Iron IIA. Its most intensive period of use was the seventh century; Tufnell lists "Bone deposits, 700–600 [BCE]."

110. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 187–88. For a drawing of the tomb plans that shows their interconnection, see D. L. Risdon, "A Study of the Cranial and Other Human Remains from

tomb adjoining Tomb 108, which was constructed during the Iron IIA, was reused in a similar manner, with secondary burials piled up inside the chamber.¹¹¹ The mass burials display several distinct features: many of the bones were burnt, the skulls were interred separately from the skeletons, and a small number of skulls showed signs of trepanation.¹¹² The excavators suggested two possible interpretations of these remarkable burials. The first is that the remains of the dead are those of the Assyrian massacre during Sennacherib's third campaign of 701.¹¹³ This is the most plausible explanation, considering the large number of interments and the manner in which they are amassed inside the tombs.¹¹⁴ But two of these tombs (108 and 120) contained a layer of pig bones scattered atop the mass of human remains. This led Olga Tufnell to suggest a second possible interpretation: The tombs were intentionally desecrated during the Josianic reform.¹¹⁵ Although the first suggestion is more likely than the second, the unusual presence of pig bones, let alone the large deposit of animal bones inside a tomb, requires explanation.¹¹⁶ Considering that Lachish was abandoned for a short period, between Levels III and II, it

Palestine Excavated at Tell Duweir (Lachish) by the Wellcome-Marston Archaeological Research Expedition," *Biometrika* 31 (1939): 101, fig. 1.

111. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 190. She refers to its seventh-century use as an "ossuary," which is the same term she uses to describe the secondary burials inside Tomb 120.

112. J. L. Starkey, "Discovery of Skulls with Surgical Holing at Tell Duweir, Palestine," *Man* 36 (1936): 169–70. Photographs of the trepanated skulls can be found in Starkey, "Discovery," pl. M and Risdon, "Cranial and Other Human Remains," pls. IV–V.

113. Starkey, "Discovery," 169, followed by D. Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib*, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology 6 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 1982), 56–58. Zimhoni, "Pottery," 1698–99 challenged this interpretation, stating that the date of the bones is uncertain. The plausibility of the historical scenario, however, outweighs the lack of clarity in establishing a precise date for both bones and ceramics, and the range of possible dates for both sets of artifacts does not exclude a seventh-century date.

114. The lack of wounds in the collection of bones has led some to prefer explanations such as a natural catastrophe rather than the Assyrian conquest. See Risdon, "Cranial and Other Human Remains," 102–6. But the burnt bones, the possibility of decapitation, and the desperate measures taken to heal several different individuals (trepanation) suggest otherwise. J. Zorn, "War and Its Effects on Civilians in Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors," in *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East*, ed. D. Nadali and J. Vidal (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 83–85 has proposed that the mass dead were the result of the extreme conditions during the Assyrian crisis, including overcrowding due to refugees.

115. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 194.

116. The pig bones are occasionally understood to indicate that the biblical dietary restrictions were not fixed or followed. If that is the case, it would make sense for a religious reform

is possible that the pig bones were placed inside these mass graves by the Assyrians or their Philistine vassals in a deliberate attempt to desecrate the remains of the Judahite dead.

In the second stage of Cemetery 100 at Lachish, a small series of tombs appear that belong to Level II. As such, they date to the last phase of the site's Iron Age occupation. Lachish was rebuilt during this stage on a scale smaller than that of the eighth-century city, though the Iron IIIA occupation would not last longer than the Babylonian destruction of the early sixth century. The late Iron IIIA tombs display a more elaborate plan than the earlier Iron IIA–Iron IIB tombs at Lachish, but the triple chamber architecture of Tomb 106 bears loose similarities to the Iron IIB tomb complex at Beth-Shemesh (compare fig. 8A with fig. 7A).¹¹⁷ The remains of Tombs 114 and 109 (see fig. 8) were partially destroyed, although both display the use of benches, a repository (in the case of Tomb 109), and multiple burials.¹¹⁸ This second stage of burial activity thus constitutes an attempt to rebuild Lachish and its population and should be compared with the tombs at Khirbet Beit Lei, a few kilometers to the north.

Jerusalem: Iron Age IIB through Iron Age III

The Iron Age cemeteries of Jerusalem are treated separately here due to their extensive nature and distinctive history. A brief survey of these aspects will allow us to compare Jerusalem's mortuary practices with those of Judah proper. The cemeteries in Jerusalem span the eastern, northern, and western peripheries of the city and are linked with the royal capital's main period of expansion during the eighth to seventh centuries BCE. This expansion began already in the ninth century, and there is evidence for ninth-century burials on the Western Hill in areas that became heavily urbanized during the later phases of the Iron IIB and IIIA periods. But the burials on the Western Hill, in an area that was included inside Jerusalem's walls during the late Iron Age, are anomalous. The occurrence of burials intensifies in number during the

to violate the tombs in such a manner. Although this suggestion is still unlikely, Josiah's reform did target cemeteries according to the books of Kings. Animal deposits inside tombs are rare, and their remains are scattered and few, so the large volume of pig remains here seems to be deliberate. The other suggestion is that the animal bones were from the provisions of the Assyrian army. This is also speculative, although it might explain the volume.

117. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 179–87 states that Tomb 105 had a similar plan to Tomb 106, although no drawings or pictures are included. This tomb was cleared in antiquity, and Tufnell (179) suggests that the burial remains were removed to 106.

118. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 188–90.

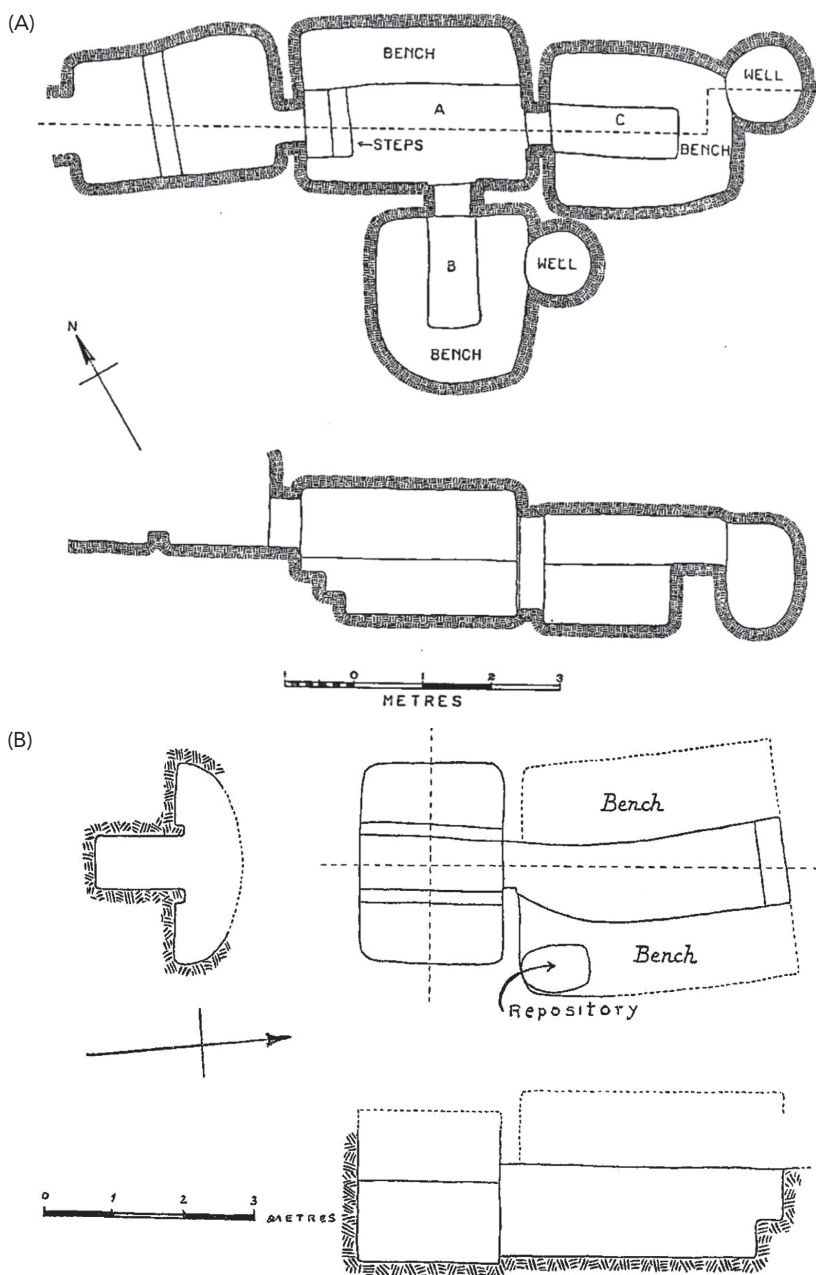


FIG. 8 Seventh-century tombs at Lachish. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

A. Lachish Tomb 106 (Tufnell 1953, 180, fig. 21)

B. Lachish Tomb 109 (Tufnell 1953, 189, fig. 22)

seventh century, and the bench tomb style becomes more elaborate in the surrounding cemeteries.

Jerusalem's eastern cemetery in Silwan, in the Kidron Valley, is unique in that the tombs are built for individual burials rather than collective interment.¹¹⁹ These tombs have features associated with elite status and incorporate architectural designs that are uncommon in Judah. The tombs tend to be larger, are often above ground, and typically include decorated features such as corbeled ceilings. There were at least four monolithic tombs (see fig. 14 and fig. 15B) carved out of bedrock. This type of funerary architecture—the above-ground, monolithic tomb—does not occur anywhere else in Judah during the Iron Age. Of these unique tombs, three bore inscriptions, which will be discussed in the next chapter. These and other tombs at Silwan were built for single or double burials, and although benches are evident in many of the burial sites, there is no evidence of collective interment. Although the Silwan cemetery has been dated to the ninth to eighth centuries BCE, with use continuing into the seventh to sixth,¹²⁰ the inscriptions found on several of the tombs—the Royal Steward Inscription, in particular—should be dated to the late eighth or seventh centuries.

North of Jerusalem's Western Hill, and northwest of the Silwan cemetery (and Kidron Valley) is the second of three prominent Iron IIIA cemeteries. Although its most notable tombs are those located inside Saint-Étienne's, there are several other burial sites within this general cemetery.¹²¹ Two tombs documented just north of the Damascus Gate reveal multichambered plans that are similar to those seen at Beth-Shemesh, Khirbet Beit Lei, Khirbet el-Qôm, and Lachish.¹²² One tomb has a double-chamber plan with five benches total and a repository.¹²³ The initial chamber has benches on the two walls adjacent to the entrance and to the opening of the second chamber.

119. D. Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993).

120. Ussishkin, *Village*, 327 suggests a late eighth-century date for the inscriptions but prefers a ninth-century setting for the tombs with gabled ceilings; see 331. A similar dating is found in Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 187–88.

121. G. Barkay, A. Kloner, and A. Mazar, "The Northern Necropolis of Jerusalem during the First Temple Period," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 119–27.

122. A. Mazar, "Iron Age Burial Caves North of the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976): 1–8 and Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar, "Northern Necropolis," 123–26.

123. Mazar, "Iron Age Burial Caves," 5–7, fig. 2.

The bench on the right side of the entrance has a repository carved into the wall, and the bench on the left extends into the far side that connects with the inner chamber. This L-shape creates additional shelf space. The inner chamber has three benches on each wall opposite the entry, and the benches have U-shaped headrests that are seen elsewhere in Jerusalem and its vicinity.¹²⁴ The other tomb has a central chamber that leads to five other chambers.¹²⁵ Although these tombs were largely denuded of remains, their architectural plan and scattered ceramic remains date them to the eighth and seventh centuries.

Beneath the Basilique Saint-Étienne de Jérusalem are two large tomb systems that engage the common features of Judahite funerary architecture but on a monumental scale.¹²⁶ The tombs are finely carved, with tight angles and relatively high ceilings. In both, a large central chamber connects with several smaller chambers that contain benches and repositories. The rectangular central chamber of Cave Complex 2 (fig. 10) connects with eight smaller chambers, two on the wall opposite the entrance and three on each of the side walls. Aside from one chamber, the first on the immediate right of the entrance, each chamber is relatively uniform in shape and size and consists of a square plan with three benches on each wall opposite the entry, with U-shaped headrests and repositories carved at the foot of the bench on the right side. This general plan is also apparent in the chambers of Cave Complex 1 and is similar to chambers in Burial Cave 24 at Ketef Hinnom. The exception is the eighth chamber, which is rectangular and void of any architectural features. This room, and the similar one in Cave Complex 1 (Chamber 9) probably served as an area for the final preparation of the body during the primary interment.

The walls of the central chamber in Cave Complex 1 (fig. 9) are decorated with carved panels and cornices, and the entry to each side chamber has a carved frame.¹²⁷ The central area connects with nine chambers that are square in shape, with the exception of Chamber 9, which is rectangular. Chambers 3–5 have three benches that are carved into the three walls opposite the

124. Mazar, "Iron Age Burial Caves," 6. This feature is also seen at a tomb at Tel Tzoba, a site a few kilometers south of Gibeon; see A. Kloner, "Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and Its Vicinity," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 19–20 (2001–2), 110–12 and 109, fig. 13.

125. Mazar, "Iron Age Burial Caves," 2–5, fig. 1.

126. Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar, "Northern Necropolis," 119–23.

127. See the drawings and plans in Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar, "Northern Necropolis," 120–21.

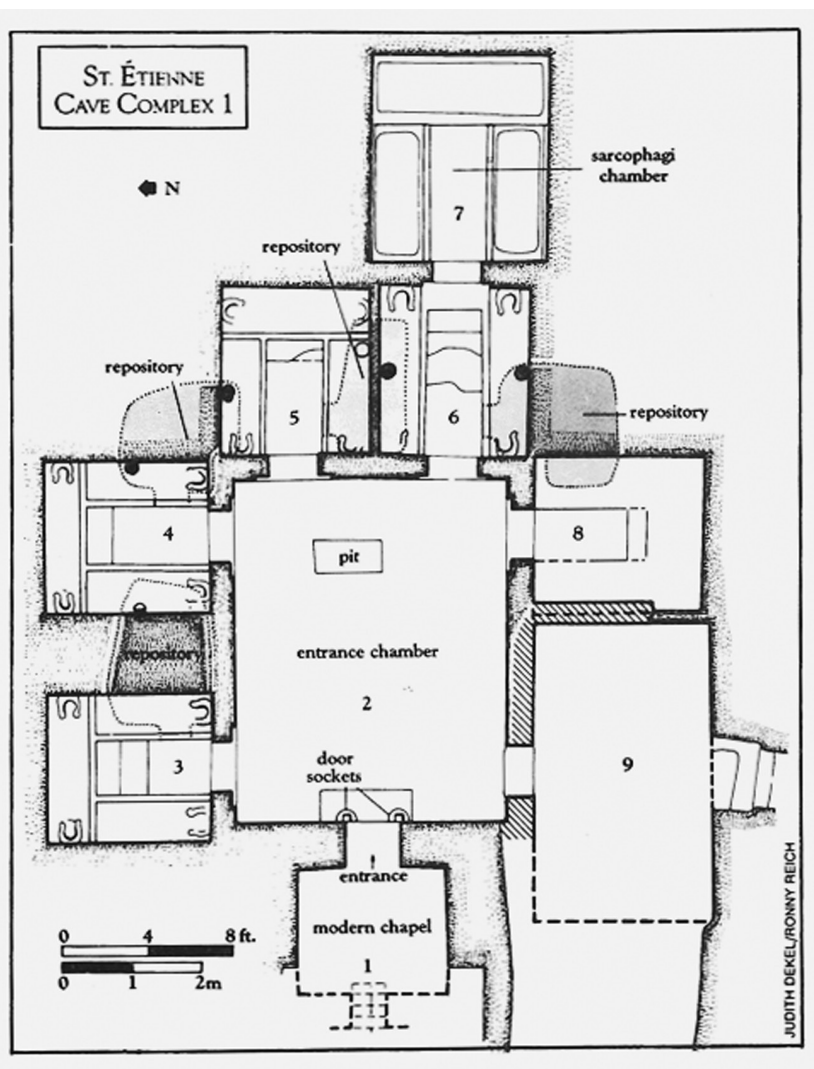


FIG. 9 Saint-Étienne Cave Complex 1 (Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar 1994, 120). Permission granted by the Israel Exploration Society.

entrance and four U-shaped headrests, two on the bench facing the entrance.¹²⁸ Each chamber has a repository carved underneath the bench to the right of the entrance. In Chambers 4–5 there is an additional hole in one of the benches

128. Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar, “Northern Necropolis,” 120–22. Chamber 8 is damaged due to reuse in late antiquity but was presumably like Chambers 3–5 in its plan.

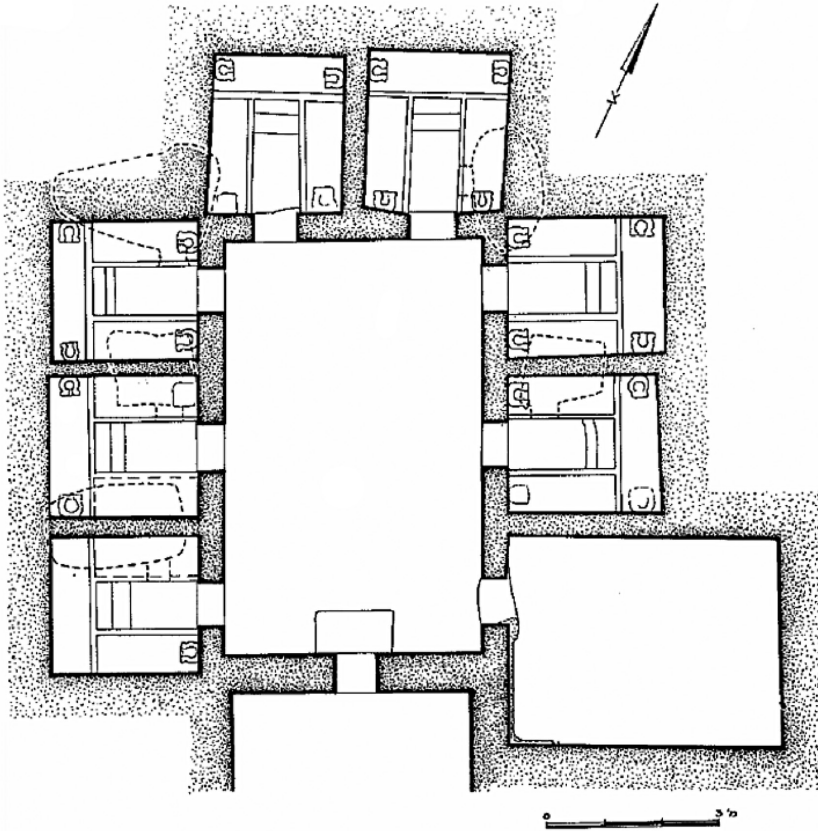


FIG. 10 Saint-Étienne Cave Complex 2 (Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar 1994, 120). Permission granted by the Israel Exploration Society.

connecting to the repository. Chamber 6 has two benches on the parallel walls adjacent to the entrance, and each bench has two U-shaped headrests and a hole connected to a repository. Beneath the bench on the right side is a repository. This chamber has a stepped entrance leading to an inner room, Chamber 7. The three walls of Chamber 7, opposite the entrance, have troughs that may have had lids at one point. This so-called “sarcophagi chamber” may have served as a place of prominence within the funerary space of Cave Complex 1.¹²⁹ If so, it is a rare occurrence of the marking of ranked status inside a bench tomb.

129. Barkay, Kloner, and Mazar, “Northern Necropolis,” 122.

The third of Jerusalem's prominent Iron IIIA cemeteries is in the Hinnom Valley along the city's western periphery. Here several bench tombs have been discovered, spanning the eighth to sixth centuries. Two tombs excavated in Mamilla area, in the northern part of the Hinnom, span the eighth to seventh centuries.¹³⁰ According to the excavator, Tomb 5 dates from the eighth to early seventh centuries, while Tomb 7 dates to the seventh century.¹³¹ Tomb 5 went out of use around the time when Tomb 7 was constructed. Both are roughly designed single-chamber rock-cut tombs with three shelf-like benches opposite the entrance, and both have a repository carved in the wall to the right of the entrance.¹³² The excavator suggested that Tomb 7 is slightly earlier than the Ketef Hinnom cemetery, which dates to the late seventh and sixth centuries.¹³³ Another tomb in the Hinnom Valley, south of Mamilla and along the slopes of the Western Hill (modern Mount Zion), was in use from the late eighth to seventh centuries.¹³⁴ This tomb, which was also discovered undisturbed, had two chambers and five benches in total.¹³⁵ The initial chamber had a shelf-like bench wrapped around the walls opposite the entrance and to the right. On the left wall was an opening to a second chamber that had three shelf benches carved into the walls opposite the entrance. This chamber has a small niche carved out of the wall of the bench on the right side, which contained a few bones. The remains of secondary rites were mainly collected along the floors next to the benches.

The most prominent burial site in the Hinnom Valley is Ketef Hinnom, where seven late Iron IIIA/Iron IIIB burial caves were excavated (fig. 11).¹³⁶

130. R. Reich, "The Ancient Burial Ground in the Mamilla Neighborhood, Jerusalem," in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 111–18. The remains of several Iron III bench tombs were noted in this area, but Tombs 5 and 7 were undisturbed (111).

131. Reich, "Ancient Burial Ground," 113–15. Reich's date is due to the relatively large number of black juglets in Tomb 5 compared to Tomb 7. This type of juglet is common in eighth-century tombs but less common in the seventh century.

132. Reich, "Ancient Burial Ground," 111. Reich published a plan of Tomb 7 (112) but not of Tomb 5.

133. The black juglet type does not appear at Ketef Hinnom. Thus, Reich ("Ancient Burial Ground," 115) concludes that the Mamilla tombs are slightly earlier.

134. A. Kloner and D. Davis, "A Burial Cave of the Late First Temple Period on the Slope of Mount Zion," in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 107–10. The date was determined by the pottery assemblage, as well as an inscribed seal. The inscription is divided into two registers, top and bottom, with a fish image in the middle and reads: "belonging to Hamiohel daughter of Menahem."

135. A detailed drawing is included in Kloner and Davis, "Burial Cave," 110.

136. G. Barkay, "Excavations at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 93–105.

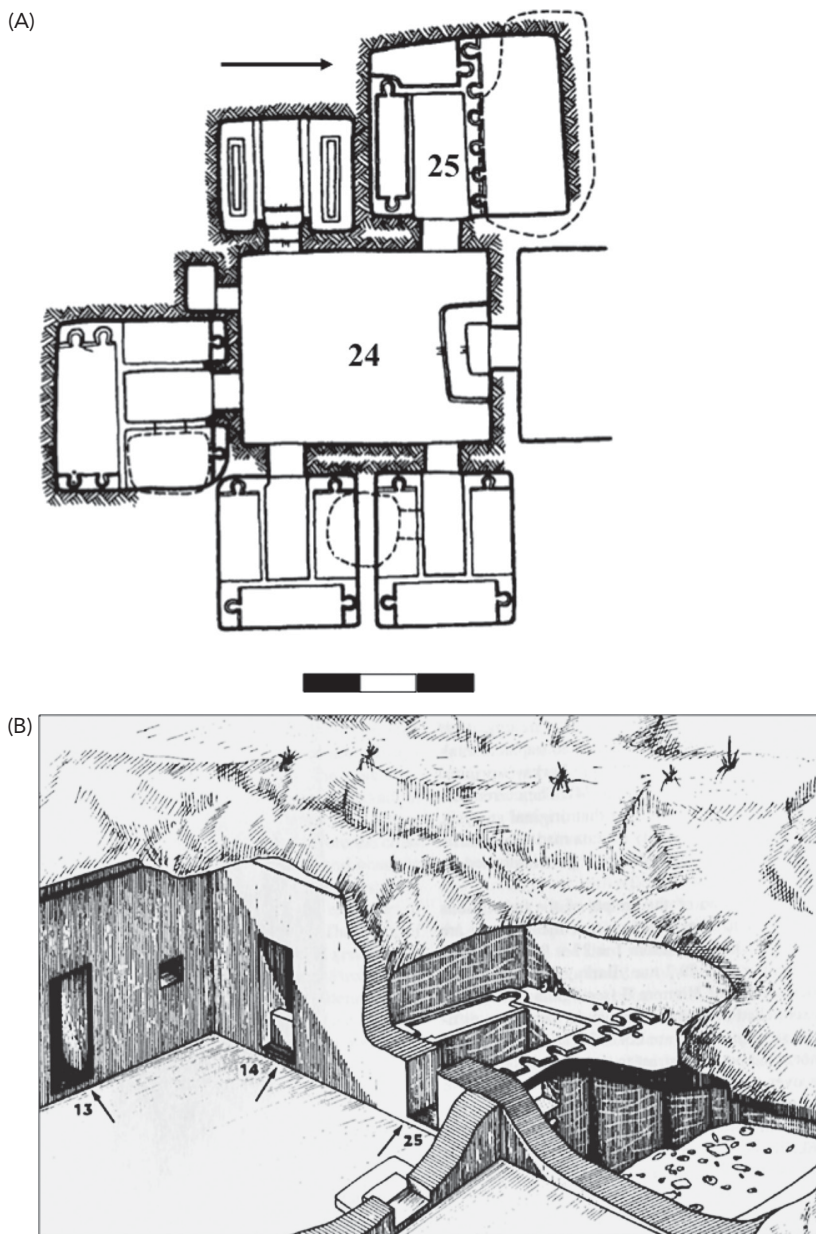


FIG. 11 Burial Cave 24 at Ketef Hinnom.

A. Plan of Burial Cave 24 (Barkay et al. 2004, 44, fig. 2); image courtesy of Gabriel Barkay and the American Schools of Oriental Research

B. Reconstruction of Burial Cave 24, Chamber 25 (Barkay 1994: 96); image courtesy of Gabriel Barkay and by permission of the Israel Exploration Society

Most of the tombs were multichambered, and six of them contained repositories carved under a bench.¹³⁷ Of the rock-cut tombs, Burial Tomb 24 was the most notable, both because of its extensive size and because of the discovery inside one of its chambers of two silver amulets that bore Hebrew inscriptions. Although the cemetery had been emptied and partially destroyed due to quarrying in late antiquity, one repository was left undisturbed. Burial Tomb 24 consisted of a large rectangular central chamber that was accessed from a stepped entrance and squared entry. The central chamber led to five chambers that were carved at right angles. Four of these chambers had benches hewn out of the three walls opposite the entrance. The fifth, Chamber 14, had two low benches with slotted openings carved into them which apparently were used to treat the corpse. Aside from the two benches in Chamber 14, every bench in Burial Tomb 24 contained a carved headrest, and two chambers (13 and 25) had benches with multiple headrests.

The bench on the right side of the entrance of Chamber 25 had a wide rectangular shape with headrests for six burials, with the bodies placed perpendicular to the wall. Carved underneath this unusually wide bench was a large repository that was discovered intact;¹³⁸ among its remains were two silver amulets containing protective prayers.¹³⁹ The amulets and their importance for understanding the individual in death will be discussed in the next chapter. Here it is important to note that they were discovered among the collective remains of previous burials that included nearly a hundred people.¹⁴⁰ The remains discovered in Burial Cave 24 indicate that it was in use during the seventh century, continuing into the late sixth century (Iron IIIB).

Overall, the Iron IIIA cemeteries of Jerusalem lead to multiple, albeit preliminary, conclusions. Aside from the idiosyncratic cemetery of Silwan, the burial sites are clustered to the north and west of the city.¹⁴¹ These cemeteries

137. Barkay, "Excavations," 93–95.

138. Barkay, "Excavations," 95–102.

139. Barkay, "Excavations," 102–5. See also G. Barkay, "The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," *Tel Aviv* 19 (1992): 139–92. The amulets will be discussed in chapter 3.

140. Barkay, "Excavations," 106. A few Hellenistic period vessels were placed on the floor of Chamber 25, indicating that the dead continued to be venerated well into the Second Temple period. The stratified deposit of remains inside the repository, however, shows that the burials spanned only the late Iron IIIA, Iron IIIB, and the early Persian period.

141. One possible reason why the cemeteries did not expand eastward, north of Silwan, is the soft, chalky limestone of the Mount of Olives, which is a weaker stone for constructing rock-cut

reflect the city's expansion during the eighth century (which probably began already in the ninth) and its maximal size during the seventh to sixth centuries prior to the Babylonian destruction. Moreover, archaeologists have discovered to the west of Jerusalem several isolated Iron IIIA tombs that were burial sites for smaller, outlying communities surrounding the royal capital.¹⁴² Together with Jerusalem's western cemetery, and to an extent the northern one, these burial sites encircled the living space of the city with the collective presence of the dead. A noticeable trend among Jerusalem's tombs during the Iron IIIA is the elaboration of the bench tomb. Like the Silwan cemeteries, the northern and western cemeteries include elaborate, intricately designed burial systems. Unlike the tombs of Silwan, however, the elite tombs of Saint-Étienne and Ketef Hinnom are built to facilitate collective interment. The ideal of the bench tomb is greatly expanded upon and magnified to an extravagant extent.

Historical Analysis

The history of mortuary practices during the Iron Age reveals several important ways Judahite culture was defined around a complex ideology of death. To begin, the bench tomb represented a stark contrast with Judah's neighboring cultures. The use of extramural cemeteries was distinct from the intramural cemeteries found among the Arameans and Assyrians.¹⁴³ The unique treatment of the body in Judah also differs significantly from surrounding cultures: the cremation practices found among the Phoenicians and Luwians,¹⁴⁴

tombs. The location of the Silwan cemetery, across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem's historical core (the City of David) may explain its unique nature as well as its early date, if it is dated as early as the ninth century BCE.

142. Kloner, "Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and Its Vicinity," 112–14 has documented several late eighth- and seventh-century tombs in the outlying areas just beyond the Iron IIIA boundaries of Jerusalem. He has related these to the rural hinterland that existed between the royal capital and the agricultural belt to the west, which included Gibeon and Tel Tzoba, among other sites.

143. F. Pedde, "The Assur Project: The Middle and Neo-Assyrian Graves and Tombs," in *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East: 12 April–16 April 2010, the British Museum and UCL, London*, ed. R. Matthews, J. Curtis, and M. Seymour (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 93–108.

144. See for example the Luwian cremation burials at Hamath; P. J. Riis, *Hama, fouilles et recherches 1931–1938*, vol. II/3, *Les cimetières à crémation* (Copenhagen: Foundation Carlsberg, 1948), as well as Carchemish, C. L. Woolley, "The Iron Age Graves of Carchemish," *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 26 (1939–40): 11–37, and P. R. S. Moorey, *Cemeteries of the First Millennium B.C. At Deve Hüyük, near Carchemish, Salvaged by T. E. Lawrence and C. L. Woolley in 1913*, British Archaeological Reports International Series 87 (Oxford: B.A.R., 1980).

the pit and cist burials seen at Philistine sites,¹⁴⁵ and mummification in Egypt.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, mortuary practices in Judah were relatively uniform, unlike the diverse customs found in the northern kingdom of Israel.¹⁴⁷ The bench tomb and the mortuary practices associated with it created a cultural identity that was particular to the Southern Kingdom.

The cultural meaning embedded in the bench tomb also becomes apparent when viewed historically. For instance, it marks a continuation of earlier Bronze Age practices in its use of extramural cave tombs. This cultural

For a brief review of Luwian (also called *Syro-Hittite*) burial customs, see I. Singer, "The Hittites and the Bible Revisited," in *"I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times": Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. A. M. Maeir and P. D. Miroschedji (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 740–43. On Phoenician practices, see M. Aubet, "The Phoenician Cemetery of Tyre," *Near Eastern Archaeologist* 73 (2010): 144–55 and Aubet, "Cremation and Social Memory in Iron Age Phoenicia," in *Ritual, Religion and Reason: Studies in the Ancient World in Honour of Paolo Xella*, ed. O. Loretz et al., *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 404 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 77–87; see also Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 52–55. It should be noted that in certain cases, particularly elite burials, Phoenicians would also practice inhumation inside sarcophagi; this seems to have been the preferred practice among royalty in Byblos and Sidon. See the discussion of the sarcophagus and the embodiment of the dead in H. Niehr, "Der Sarkophag des Königs Ahirom von Byblos," in *Tekmeria: Archäologische Zeugnisse in Ihrer Kulturhistorischen und Politischen Dimension. Beiträge Für Werner Gauer*, ed. N. Kreutz and B. Schweitzer (Münster: Scriptorium, 2006), 240–41.

145. Master and Aja, "Philistine Cemetery," 156–57. A cemetery similar to Ashkelon has been reported at Tel Erani, roughly twenty-three kilometers to the east; however, it is not yet published. Many of the Philistine pit burials are individual, although an Iron IB–Iron IIA cave tomb with communal burials was found at Gath of the Philistines; see M. Faerman et al., "' . . . In Their Lives, and in Their Death . . .': A Preliminary Study of an Iron Age Burial Cave at Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi, Israel," *Zeitschrift für Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 127 (2011): 29–48. The boundaries dividing cultures, though real, were often messy. Thus, the Philistine cemeteries at Ashkelon and Azor included other burial types, such as a few instances of cremation, though the cist/pit burials were more common. Still, the presence of cremation and built tombs indicates Canaanite cultural influences at these Philistine settlements. See further, D. Ben-Shlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor," 47–51 and Ben-Shlomo, "Burial Customs at Azor during Iron Age IB–IIA," in *The Azor Cemetery: Moshe Dothan's Excavations, 1958 and 1960*, ed. D. Ben-Shlomo, *Israel Antiquities Authority Reports* 50 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2012), 203–12.

146. See J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 26–38, and C. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 66–73. Note the particular role of the body in Egyptian mythologies of the dead. The corpse was deconstructed and then reassembled through embalming and mummification; once this process was completed, the dead would become part of the collective community of Osiris.

147. I. Yezerski, "Iron Age Burial Customs in the Samaria Highlands," *Tel Aviv* 40 (2013): 72–98. See, e.g., the two sites—Askar, near Shechem, and Eilar, near Tulkarm—published in Y. Magen and I. Eisenstadt, "Ancient Burial Caves in Samaria," in *Burial Caves and Sites in Judea and Samaria: From the Bronze and Iron Ages*, ed. H. Hizmi and A. De-Groot, *Judea and*

continuity is acutely evident in the reuse and replication of earlier loculus tombs at sites such as Lachish and Tel 'Ira. The ability of shelf-like loculi to provide a resting place for multiple interments inside a single cave tomb makes the loculus tomb an early antecedent of the bench tomb. Therefore, bench and loculus were used together in Judah and served similar mortuary needs.¹⁴⁸ The squared chamber plan of the bench tomb, which became more popular by the eighth century, is a significant cultural development. Likewise, the widespread use of a repository to store the collective remains of the dead becomes an important characteristic of Judahite mortuary culture. Each of these components—squared chambers and repositories, including pits—can be found in a few earlier cemeteries such as those at Tell el-Far'ah (South) and Tel 'Eton.¹⁴⁹ But their occurrence becomes more frequent beginning in the Iron IIB, with a distribution that is tightly clustered in Judah. The repository's ability to store multiple generations transformed the collective space of the family tomb, revealing the construction of ancestral identities that were acutely Judahite.

The bench tomb's cultural meaning is also evident in its local situation, not just its historical distribution. The extramural cemeteries symbolized various aspects of Judah, most likely relating to the kingdom's diverse cultural background. For instance, their location outside the settled space of a village could appeal to pastoralist traditions, where transhumance would result in secondary burials. Note, for example, the importance of a bounded cemetery outside of Hebron in the patriarchal narratives (the Cave of Machpelah in Gen 23:4–9), as well as the biblical accounts of the reburial of bones, such as those of Joseph in Josh 24:32 and Saul in 2 Sam 21:13–14. At the same time, the conventional plan of the bench tomb, with its square design and three benches, was a powerful symbol of traditional sedentary life: the four-room

Samaria Publications (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 1–76. Note also the diversity of mortuary culture in the northern Levant during the tenth to ninth centuries. For example, at Guzana, the few elite burials inside the city are both inhumation (on the terrace near the palace of Karpara) and cremation (near the southern gate); see M. Oppenheim, F. Langenegger, K. Müller, and R. Naumann, *Tell Halaf II: Die Bauwerke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1950), 100–104, 159–63, and W. Orthmann, *Die aramäisch-assyrische Stadt Guzana: Ein Rückblick auf die Ausgrabungen Max von Oppenheims in Tell Halaf* (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 2002). The Luwian practice of cremation was also adopted by earlier Arameans in a few isolated cases; see A. Tenu, "Assyrians and Arameans in the Euphrates Valley Viewed from the Cemetery of Tell Shiukh Fawqāni (Syria)," *Syria* 86 (2009): 85–91.

148. See the comments of Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 44–45 regarding the different plans and their early history.

149. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 42–45.

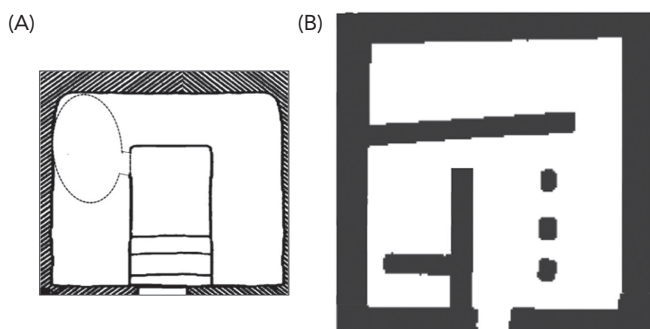


FIG. 12 Comparison of bench tomb and four-room house. Author's image.

A. Judahite bench tomb

B. Four-room house

house. Archaeologists have often noted the familiar design and multigenerational use of both the four-room house and the bench tomb.¹⁵⁰

The bench tomb's affinity to the four-room house is apparent in its spatial organization, divided into different areas—benches and rooms—along the three sides of the structure opposite the entrance (see fig. 12). They also are comparable in their similar plans of access. Both architectural designs have a single entrance into a central chamber that provides access to the adjoining areas. Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz have suggested that this access, which they describe as “tree shaped,” reflects the egalitarian ethos of the Israelite four-room house.¹⁵¹ This type of access contrasted with the “hierarchy of access” seen in contemporary Canaanite-Phoenician domestic structures.¹⁵² In the latter type of structure, rooms were interconnected, and access was restricted from one area to the next. The tree-shaped central access in both the four-room house and bench tomb certainly reflects a sense of inclusivity, even if it is not necessarily egalitarian. Conversely, this form of access could indicate the central authority of a family leader (ראש בית אב, “chief of the house of the father”; see Exod 6:14) within the nested hierarchy of Judah's patrimonial society. In any case, the spatial syntax that Faust and Bunimovitz

150. Mazar, “Iron Age Burial Caves,” 4 n. 9; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000–586 B.C.E.*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 520–21; Barkay, “Burial Caves and Burial Practices,” 147–52; J. Osborne, “Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 70 (2011): 47–53; and Borowski, *Lahav III*, 4–5.

151. Faust and Bunimovitz, “Four Room House,” 28–29.

152. See the schematic in Faust and Bunimovitz, “Four Room House,” 28.

see in the four-room house is a critical component of Judahite tombs. Central access is a primary feature of the two main types of Judahite tomb: the older loculus tomb (e.g., Lachish Tomb 4005; see fig. 5) and the conventional square chamber (Beth-Shemesh Tomb 2; see fig. 7C).¹⁵³ Space in both the loculus tomb and the conventional bench tomb is organized around a tree-shaped central access, which suggests that both types of tombs adopt a common ideal despite their architectural differences. Even in the unique tombs at Saint-Étienne, where the bench tomb plan is elaborated and expanded on a grand scale, space is organized around a central access.

The analogy between the bench tomb and the four-room house does not extend beyond general spatial syntax. The specific meaning and particular function of each area differed, the internal dynamics of the tomb are not comparable with the living space of the house.¹⁵⁴ But the similarities do reveal a conservativeness that was rooted in the idea of the family, which became important in Judahite society during the Iron IIB. In a separate article on the bench tomb, Faust and Bunimovitz have suggested that this tomb design represented an attempt to preserve “in stone” the house of the father as an extended family unit. Deliberate emulation of the four-room house also would have served as a “counter symbol” during the events of the eighth century: “the period under discussion was a troubled one. Accelerated urbanization, growing population, and increased hired labour along with external political and military pressures, all led to the disintegration of lineages and extended families in the urban sector and to growing insecurity.”¹⁵⁵ Their suggestion is important because it relates the symbolism of the bench tomb to sociohistorical change. One could also point out that many of the eighth-century events they highlight here are attributes of a developing Judahite state. Alexander Fantalkin has suggested that the origins of the bench tomb is related to

153. The exceptions, of course, were Silwan’s monumental tombs (which are anomalous) and the occasional by-form of the bench tomb that had two interlinked chambers, seen at Gibeon and Lachish, Tomb 109.

154. E.g., A. Faust and H. Katz, “The Archaeology of Purity and Impurity: A Case-Study from Tel ‘Eton, Israel,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 27 (2017): 1–27 have examined the relationship between the organization of space and purity concerns in the four-room house and suggested that it constitutes a means of separating family members during periods of impurity such as menstruation. It is unclear how this particular concern for impurity would apply to the bench tomb, since the entire area was rendered impure by the presence of the dead. This is, of course, based on the biblical concept of purity and impurity, but there is nothing in the remains of any Judahite tomb that would suggest otherwise.

155. Faust and Bunimovitz, “Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb,” 150–70. The following quote is from 162.

Judah's state formation.¹⁵⁶ This historical hypothesis is important to consider because it emphasizes the cultural particularity of the bench tomb within a larger socio-political setting.

The theories briefly reviewed here emphasize the social and historical factors of the bench tomb, but more can be said regarding what these practices imply about death and Judahite culture. The intimate problem of death was resolved through an important innovation, but this innovation itself was presented in traditional terms. The multigenerational burials inside the bench tomb became the joint family house for the dead.¹⁵⁷ Although cave tombs used for collective burial could serve such mortuary practices, the rock-cut design of the bench tomb imitated the plan of the typical Judahite house in order to create a house for dead bodies.¹⁵⁸ These bodies were transformed into ancestors through ritual practices. Catherine Bell noted that conservatism could be a key attribute in the ritual treatment of the body.¹⁵⁹ The treatment of the body within the ritual space of the bench tomb, together with the tomb's house symbolism, could convey a sense of what ancient Judahites considered traditional life. Even though the widespread adoption of repositories is a general innovation of the Iron II, it could still be seen as how "things have always been done" (to use Bell's words) because this innovation was set within the multigenerational house of the bench tomb.¹⁶⁰

The emulation of the traditional domestic space in the form of the tomb turned the burial place into a distinct symbol of the Judahite family and, hence, of the Judahite ancestral ideal. The wide distribution of the bench tomb throughout Judah during the Iron IIB, and the intensity of its occurrence in

156. Fantalkin, "Appearance," 17–36. According to Fantalkin, the bench tomb emerged first in the Shephelah and was later adopted throughout the kingdom when (according to Fantalkin) the powerbase shifted from the lowland hills to Jerusalem.

157. This point is articulated nicely in E. Bloch-Smith, "From Womb to Tomb: The Israelite Family in Death as in Life," in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. Dutcher-Walls (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 127–29.

158. Specifically, the four-room house, as emphasized by Faust and Bunimovitz, "Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb," 161–62.

159. Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92.

160. Quote from Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 205. Hallote, "Real and Ideal Identities," 105–9 has discussed a similar continuity of cemeteries in the southern Levant during the MB. Hallote makes the important observation that mortuary culture is often conservative, especially when inheritance is at stake. Changes in society could often result in new groups claiming resources through the use of older cemeteries and the preservation of certain elements of mortuary culture.

Jerusalem during the Iron IIIA, should be seen as an effort to construct a Judahite cultural identity that was presented in the traditional trappings of the family.¹⁶¹ Tombs were as much about the preservation of this cultural ideal of family ancestors as they were about promoting it throughout the kingdom. The advantage in associating family imagery with the bench tomb was that it could preserve a multigenerational sense of kinship (the ancestors) regardless of whether the predominant family unit was extended or nuclear.

The traditional imagery of the bench tomb and the constructed sense of collective ancestry taken together suggest new ways of understanding the meaning of extramural cemeteries. Multigenerational tombs tied the ancestors to patrimony, but the question remains: What was being inherited? These cemeteries are typically clustered in one or two different areas (see, for example, Beth-Shemesh and Lachish), so it is unclear how different kinship groups could claim specific resources in the outlying countryside. The answer becomes clear if we look at the problem from the perspective of the living. The symbolism of the bench tomb as a house for the dead deliberately reflects the houses of the living. The Judahite tomb represents the physical manifestation of ancestors, housed within a traditional form. The creation of extramural cemeteries created spaces for the dead that existed in the orbit of urban environments. The living and the dead are linked through the symbol of the house. The bounded cemeteries that surrounded the urban space of the living indicate that the patrimony marked by these tombs was the Judahite city itself. Through ancestral identities, the people of Judah could claim their place, regardless of whether it was life in the royal capital (Jerusalem), the towns of the Shephelah (such as Beth-Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, Lachish), or in a remote part of the kingdom (Tel 'Ira).

161. In this sense, I depart from the historical hypothesis proposed by Fantalkin, "Appearance," 23–35 regarding the origins of Judah's ruling elite.

Writing and the Tomb

HEBREW FUNERARY INSCRIPTIONS provide important voices that speak directly from the tomb. These writings offer invaluable information for tracing the history of death in Judah. The inscriptions began to appear in Judahite tombs by the late Iron II period, and they include inscribed artifacts, such as silver amulets,¹ but also writings on the tombs themselves. This is an important detail, because tomb epitaphs are rare among Northwest Semitic inscriptions. Phoenician mortuary writing generally consisted of inscriptions on objects such as sarcophagi that were placed inside tombs.² The names of the dead could be also inscribed upon stelae,³ but the Aramaic and Phoenician examples were not necessarily associated with cemeteries.⁴ In fact there are only a few possible cases of tomb inscriptions in these languages that date to

1. In addition to the silver amulets from Ketef Hinnom, personal seals have been discovered interred with the dead inside tombs. See, e.g., the individual seals found at Beth-Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh), Ketef Hinnom, and Mount Zion, published in D. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems (Beth-Shemesh)* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1913), 91–92; G. Barkay, “Excavations at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 101; and A. Kloner and D. Davis, “A Burial Cave of the Late First Temple Period on the Slope of Mount Zion,” in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 108–10, respectively.

2. E.g., the early Iron Age sarcophagus of Ahirom from Byblos (KAI 1) and the Persian period sarcophagi of Tabnit (KAI 13) and his son Eshmunazor (KAI 14) from Sidon.

3. Among the abundant examples in Phoenician, see CIS 1, 58, and F. M. Cross, “Appendix I: Phoenician Tomb Stelae from Akhziv,” in *The Akhziv Cemeteries: The Ben-Dor Excavations, 1941–1944*, ed. M. Dayagi-Mendels, IAA Reports (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2002), 169–73. Notable Aramaic examples include the stelae from Neirab and Katumuwa’s stele from Zincirli (Sam’al). Both inscriptions are discussed in this book. For the wider historical significance of epitaphs in Northwest Semitic, see S. Sanders, “Naming the Dead: Funerary Writing and Historical Change in the Iron Age Levant,” *Maarav* 19 (2012): 11–36.

4. The Neirab stelae both mention possible graves (ʾrṣ in KAI 225:7 and 226:8), but Katumuwa’s stele was found inside a home, far from any cemetery. The Akhziv stelae were associated with a cemetery, but the more common form of Phoenician stelae (or ‘pillar’ *mšbt*) only occasionally mention burial in their commemorative epigraphs. Even these mentions

the Iron Age.⁵ The appearance of Hebrew epigraphs on tombs is thus relatively unique in Northwest Semitic writings. Their number is limited, but the features of these inscriptions suggest that this type of writing was not anomalous. Although the inscriptions are often formulaic, they can also vary in style. Together these features suggest that funerary writing was an established practice by the late eighth century. This chapter will examine four prominent examples in order to understand why writing became an important part of mortuary culture during this phase of Judah's history.⁶

The general dating of this corpus of Hebrew inscriptions ranges from the late eighth century (the Silwan inscriptions) into the seventh and early sixth centuries (the probable date for the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb). In their form and content, these inscriptions reveal a stock vocabulary and a basic set of features. The features begin with the name of the dead, which is expected. They also include descriptions of space, either through deictic reference ("This is the sepulcher of . . .") or general description. For example, an inscription (fig. 13) that was discovered in the nineteenth century on a cave several kilometers west of Jerusalem (and now lost) read: "the chamber" (החדר).⁷ Although not recognized at the time of its discovery, the cave was most certainly a Judahite tomb dating to the seventh century. The single surviving word is one that occurs elsewhere at Silwan and Khirbet el-Qôm, where it references the tomb's interior.

are rare and ambiguous: e.g., *KAI* 35:2 refers to "the place of my peaceful repose" (*l mškb. nḥty*) in the description of the pillar's creation, which may refer to the place of interment. The fact that these inscriptions are often found outside of any funerary context does not help.

5. The only unambiguous example from the Iron Age is *KAI* 2, a warning that was engraved inside the entrance shaft to Ahirom's tomb. *KAI* 30, a Phoenician inscription from Cyprus, may have originally adorned a tomb. More far-flung examples can be found among Punic inscriptions from North Africa. In Aramaic, the only possible Iron Age example is a stele found outside of Zincirli; see "Sam'alian Funerary Stele: Ördëkburnu," trans. A. Lemaire (*COS* 4.24:96–97). Rather than marking a tomb, however, it is more likely that this inscription commemorated the dead in an area separate from their burial. This observation is based on the other Aramaic inscriptions from Zincirli concerning the dead, such as the Katumuwa Stele.

6. I am currently preparing an edition of the Hebrew funerary inscriptions in collaboration with Jacqueline Vayntrub for the Society of Biblical Literature's Writings from the Ancient World series.

7. J. E. Hanaeur visited the cave at Saris (today Shoreshe) in 1889. He published his drawings in Hanaeur, "Curious Cave at Saris," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1889): 184–85 and Hanaeur, "Cave of Saris," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1890): 71–73. Hanaeur did not identify the writing as a tomb inscription. This interpretation was first offered by G. Barkay in a 1977 conference paper, unpublished but cited and discussed by Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 436–37.



FIG. 13 Drawing of the Saris inscription (Hanaeur 1889: 185).

Other features that typify funerary inscriptions include Yahweh's invocation, curses, and warnings. These features typify Hebrew funerary writings even though they do not always occur together. For example, the injunctions found in the Silwan necropolis do not mention the God of Israel. But the call for Yahweh's protection of the dead seen in other inscriptions serves a purpose similar to the Silwan tomb warnings.⁸ The blessings and curses were meant to protect the tomb's occupants.⁹ Taken together, the features found in this important corpus articulate aspects of death that are otherwise inferred in the interpretation of mortuary remains.

The Funerary Inscriptions of the Silwan Necropolis

Four inscriptions have come from the Silwan necropolis east of Jerusalem, two of which currently reside in the British Museum.¹⁰ The significance of these inscriptions is apparent in their original setting within the cemetery.

8. J. Smoak, "May the Lord Bless You and Guard You from Evil: The Rhetorical Argument of Ketef Hinnom Amulet I and the Form of the Prayers for Deliverance in the Psalms," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12 (2012): 202–36.

9. The recent monograph by B. Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic*, FAT 105 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 123–62 provides important insight into the apotropaic nature of inscriptions found inside tombs. Schmidt focuses on the problem of daemonic powers and their perceived threat inside the tomb, yet he does not address the problem of grave robbers and those who might disturb the dead. This issue is well known from treaty curses and is evident in several biblical passages, including Deut 28:26 and Jer 8:1–2.

10. C. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine during the Years 1873–1874*, 2 vols., trans. A. Stewart (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1899), 1:309–16 first identified the inscriptions, with the exception of *Silw* 4. For editions of each, see D. Ussishkin,

Among the monumental tombs of the Silwan necropolis, at least four were monolithic, stand-alone structures.¹¹ These burial monuments stood out even among the elite tombs of what was probably the most exclusive cemetery of Jerusalem (except, of course, the royal tombs). Of these four monumental sepulchers, three bore inscriptions.

Collectively, the inscriptions display three of the four characteristics of Hebrew funerary inscriptions. The one feature they lack is any reference to Yahweh. The Royal Steward Inscription famously includes a warning against grave robbers, but the common theme in all of the inscriptions is an expressed sense of spatiality. The theme is closely interrelated with the first element of tomb inscriptions, the identification of the dead. But this form of identification was public and monumental, and can be considered ostentatious. In each case, the inscription is written on the exterior of the tomb, above or near its entrance. Although the monumentality of the Silwan necropolis is rare in ancient Judah, it offers important insight into death, identity, and memory. Rather than caves carved underground, here we see the use of above-ground architecture to visibly mark the space of the dead. At Silwan the identity of the dead was publicly displayed in a manner unlike anywhere else in Judah. This aspect of monumentality plays an important part in the prophetic rebuke of tomb building found in Isa 22, which is often compared with the Royal Steward Inscription. Thus, it is necessary to review the ways in which space is defined, and specifically associated with the dead, in the inscriptions of Silwan.

I will begin this review of the Silwan inscriptions with the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter (Tomb 3; see fig. 14), despite the fact that its epitaph is the most fragmentary of this group, limited in its extant form to only two letters, one of which is reconstructed.¹² The significance of this inscription is not confined to what it may have said, its importance involves also the monumental setting of the writing itself. The Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter is today the most visible of Silwan's monolithic sepulchers. Studies of this tomb have

The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993), 241–54; J. Renz, *Die althebräischen Inschriften*, Teil 1, *Text und Kommentar*, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik* I (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 264–65; W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 401–6; and S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 44–49.

11. Ussishkin, *Village*, 266–67 states that there may have been as many as five such tombs. The tombs that bore inscriptions are Tomb 3 (the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter), Tomb 34, and Tomb 35 (the royal steward's), following Ussishkin's numbering.

12. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*, 315 first detected the ך and traces of an adjacent letter, either a ך or ך. His drawings were published in C. Clermont-Ganneau, *Mission*

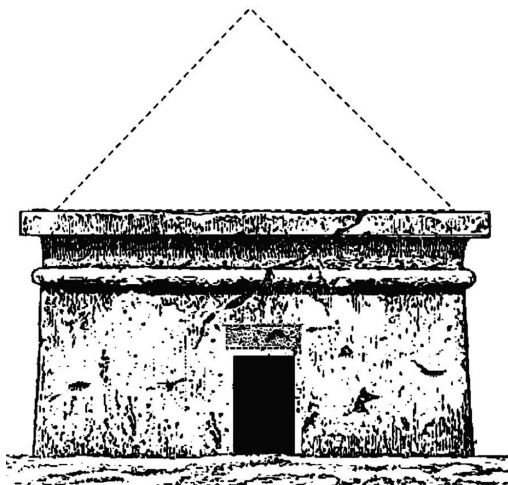


FIG. 14 Reconstruction of the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter. The door, lintel, and roof are redrawn (adapted by the author based on Clermont-Ganneau 1884: 111).

suggested that it was once adorned with an Egyptian-style pyramid roof.¹³ The pyramidal roof was carved, along with the rest of the structure, as one piece from bedrock. Unfortunately, quarrying in late antiquity reduced the tomb to its present form. But the reconstruction of the sepulcher provides important insight into the monumentality of the Silwan necropolis and demonstrates how writing featured prominently in this aspect of the tomb. The purpose of the tomb was to be public and visible. For this reason, the inscription was located on the tomb's façade, above its entrance. The lintel included a carved space for writing, highlighting the words, which were written in large script.

Taken together, the grand scale of this structure and the prominence of its epigraphy show how the identity and memory of the dead were intricately linked through the tomb's space. The Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter continues

en Palestine et en Phénicie: entreprise en 1881. Cinquième Rapport (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1884), 111 n. 73. Subsequent research into the monument has agreed with his observations, with little variance; see the slightly differing opinion of R. A. S. Macalister, "Reports from R.A. Stewart Macalister, M.A., F.S.A.," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Series* 34 (1902): 121. Ussishkin, *Village*, 241–42 generally follows Clermont-Ganneau, although he suggests other readings that are less plausible. For instance, he includes ק among the possible readings for the partial letter, though he is cautious and does not offer any reconstructions of the word. When I inspected the inscription closely on July 25, 2016, the head of the first letter looked identical to that of the adjacent ר, in which case the last word of the inscription was most likely "cursed," part of the common vocabulary of Hebrew funerary texts. *Silw* 2:2 has the plene spelling of ארור but the form ארר is found in the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions.

13. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*, 313–16. This suggestion is supported by Ussishkin, *Village*, 50–54; see ill. 29, 34–35, which offer reconstructions but also illustrate the method of quarrying that destroyed the solid stone roof.

to occupy a conspicuous place in Jerusalem's landscape, protruding, as it does, out of the Kidron Valley along the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The name of this tomb's occupant, originally interred inside, was lost when the lintel of the entrance was destroyed. Despite this fact, an element of immortality remains in what is left of the tomb, carved out of bedrock on a colossal scale.

The most famous of the Silwan corpus, the Royal Steward Inscription (*Silw* 1), is actually one of two inscriptions found on Tomb 35 (see fig. 15).¹⁴ Its literary form is also found in another fragmentary inscription from the necropolis (*Silw* 4 on Tomb 34).¹⁵ Taken together, these inscriptions provide a context for studying *Silw* 1. The Royal Steward Inscription was originally inscribed on the lintel above the entrance of a stand-alone monolithic sepulcher.¹⁶ The second inscription was originally located on the wall to the right of the entrance.¹⁷ Although the inner dimensions of the tomb were augmented in late antiquity, Tomb 35 originally consisted of two rooms referred to by the excavators as the "outer chamber" and the "lateral chamber."¹⁸ The tomb is entered through the outer chamber, which was a squared room with walls decorated with a cornice. A burial bench was presumably located at the far end, opposite the entrance. Although the interior was enlarged and now

14. The second inscription (*Silw* 2) is shorter, and the surviving text does not offer any historical details that might parallel the first; see Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 403–5 and the editions in Renz, *Die Althebräischen Inschriften*, 1, 264–65 and Ussishkin, *Village*, 247–54. On the interment ideology involved in the inscription's curses, see Saul M. Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 614–15.

15. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*, 309 was made aware of this inscription but was unable to see it because it had been hidden behind a modern doorway constructed by the current inhabitants. The inscription was rediscovered by A. Reifenberg, "A Newly Discovered Hebrew Inscription of the Pre-exilic Period," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 21 (1948): 134–37. Like the other inscriptions (except *Silw* 2), it was written above the tomb's entrance. Literarily, it compares with *Silw* 1 in its opening formula (-----[אתן] קברתן), providing the missing word in the lacuna at the beginning of the Royal Steward Inscription. In addition, the second line seems to replicate part of the warning against "those who open [the tomb]." Unlike the other inscriptions, however, this one was not written inside a recessed panel; see Ussishkin, *Village*, 243 and E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series* 7; *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 123 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 209.

16. The description here follows that of Ussishkin, *Village*, 188–201. David Ussishkin and Gabriel Barkay excavated Tomb 35 as part of a wider survey of the Silwan necropolis.

17. To the right of the entrance is a window-like opening that connects with the area of the lateral chamber, although this opening was not part of the tomb's original plan. On the far right side of the façade was a trapezoidal footing that apparently served some manner of funerary ritual, possibly as a place for food offering; see Ussishkin, *Village*, 193, 293.

18. Ussishkin, *Village*, 198–201.

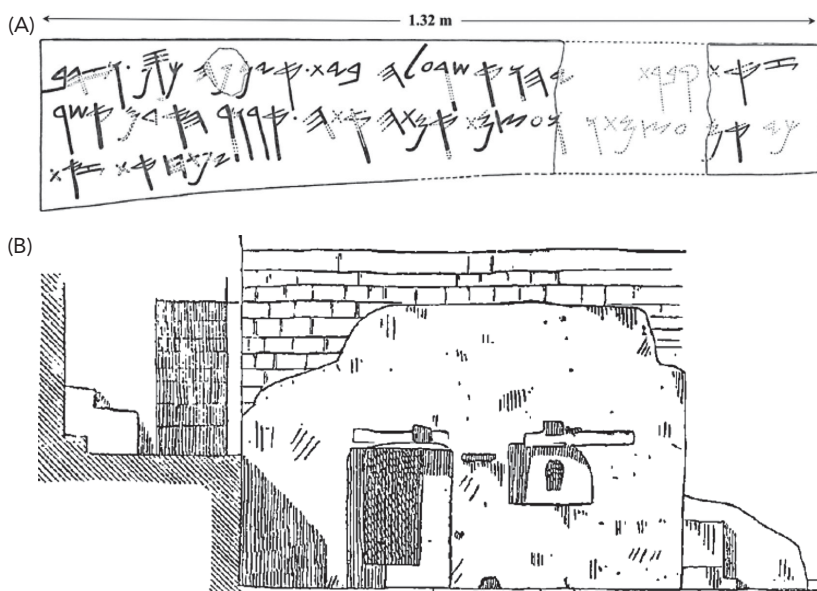


FIG. 15 The Royal Steward Inscription and its original location in the Silwan necropolis.

A. The Royal Steward Inscription (Avigad 1953: pl. IX, B); permission granted by the Israel Exploration Society

B. Silwan Tomb 35, the Tomb of the Royal Steward (Clermont-Ganneau 1899: 308)

constitutes a single space, the lateral chamber was located on the right side of the outer chamber, adjacent to the entrance. This chamber had a single trough-like bench similar to other tombs at Silwan (Tombs 1, 9, and 19), as well as Chamber 7 of Burial Cave 1 at Saint-Étienne.

The two inscriptions were originally located on the front exterior of the tomb, inscribed at the same height, with the first on the left side and above the entrance.¹⁹

Silw 1

¹: This is the [sepulcher of PN-]jah, the royal steward. There is neither silver nor gold [he]re, ²: [but] only [his bones] and his concubine's bon[es] w[ith] him. Cursed be the one who ³: opens this (sepulcher).

19. The nineteenth-century explorer Charles Clermont-Ganneau first noticed that the inscriptions were written in epigraphic Hebrew script (which he termed *Phoenician*) during a visit to Silwan; see Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*, 305–13 and Ussishkin, *Village*, 188–89. Upon this discovery the inscriptions were removed and purchased by the

Silw 2

The chamber in the side of the vau[lt belongs to PN]

The first feature of *Silw 1* is the identification of the dead. Although the text is damaged, and only part of the proper name is preserved (the theophoric element יהו), the inscription includes the title of the deceased: literally, “the one over the house” (אשר על הבית). In fact, the description of the dead is an important element in this inscription, and this element is manifested in different ways. The dead person is the implicit owner of the tomb, he is identified by title, and he is described in terms of his mortal remains (bones). The last two points of identification are also extended to the royal steward’s co-occupant in the tomb, his concubine.

The Identification of the Dead at Silwan

Both the Royal Steward Inscription and the inscription on Tomb 34 (*Silw 4*) begin with a construct chain that starts with the demonstrative particle, connecting the name of the dead to the funerary monument. This is important because the opening line compares with a Northwest Semitic dedication formula that is occasionally used in funerary inscriptions. The Silwan inscriptions (*Silw 1* and 4) are not dedicatory—that is, nothing is being dedicated by anyone, for anyone. These inscriptions are declarations of ownership. The comparison of the Northwest Semitic dedication formula with the opening words of the Silwan tomb inscriptions lies in the fact that both formulae begin by referring to the inscribed artifact.

The opening words of *Silw 1* and 4 identify the inscribed object in relation to the dead. This type of opening is similar to funerary dedications such as that of the Ahirom sarcophagus. In this Phoenician inscription from Byblos, the first word of the text is the name of the inscribed object, *ʾrn* ‘sarcophagus’ (*KAI 1:1*). The Hebrew inscriptions from Silwan differ in that the first word is a demonstrative particle followed by the object: “This is the sepulcher . . .” The

British Museum, where they are currently located. The two epigraphic Hebrew texts were not accurately read until the 1950s, when they were studied by Nahman Avigad; see N. Avigad, “The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 3 (1953): 137–52 and Avigad, “The Second Tomb-Inscription of the Royal Steward,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 5 (1955): 163–66. Avigad’s reading of *Silw 2* was revised by D. Ussishkin, “On the Shorter Inscription from the ‘Tomb of the Royal Steward,’” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 196 (1969): 16–22. See also Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 403–406.

noun קברה, which is translated here “sepulcher,” is obviously the tomb upon which the inscription appears.²⁰ In the Hebrew Bible, this form of the Hebrew word for tomb seems to be reserved for specialized, individual burial places.²¹ An excellent example is Rachel’s tomb, or sepulcher, which is referred to as קברת רחל in Gen 35:20 and 1 Sam 10:2. The syntax of Rachel’s tomb parallels the reconstructed texts of *Silw* 1 and 4, where the construct state of the word is combined with a proper name, denoting ownership. The use of a specialized term for elaborate, individual burial structures is appropriate for the funerary monuments at Silwan. The individualizing nature of the tomb, as well as the inscribed declaration of ownership, also constitutes an important distinction from funerary dedications.

To return to the Ahirom sarcophagus (and others like it), its opening word is part of a relative clause that ties the living to the dead: “This is the sarcophagus that ’Ittoba’al made . . . for Ahirom, his father” (ʾr̥n z pʾl ʾt̥bʾl . . . lʾh̥rm). The Silwan inscriptions on the other hand begin with a demonstrative, at once asserting both the presence of the tomb and its ownership. The name of the dead and the space of the dead are singularly focused. There is no second name recorded in the Hebrew inscriptions because they are not dedications. Instead, they commemorate the name of the dead by asserting their monumental place in Jerusalem’s eastern cemetery. This is an important, though often overlooked, element in *Silw* 1. The immortality claimed by the royal steward here is based on his own achievements rather than attained through a surviving lineage.

The absence of another name rhetorically focuses the words of the inscription around the individual known as the royal steward. The irony is that his name is lost because of the lacuna.²² The inscription does mention a second person, the royal steward’s concubine (אמה), although unfortunately her name

20. The two inscriptions support one another. The feminine singular construct קברה with defective spelling in *Silw* 4 provides the parallel for the first line of *Silw* 1, where the word is missing. Likewise, the f. sg. demonstrative זאת can be confidently restored to the beginning of *Silw* 4 based on its presence in *Silw* 1.

21. Both קברה and the more common קבר derive from the same root and are distinguished morphologically only with a feminine sufformative ה-, yet the biblical occurrence of the former indicates that it holds a distinct nuance; see M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 112. Thus, קברה is descriptive of Moses’s special burial (Deut 34:6). The term is also used in Kings and Chronicles, whenever a Judahite ruler is buried outside the tombs of the City of David: Amaziah (2 Kgs 9:28), Amon (2 Kgs 21:26), Josiah (2 Kgs 23:30), and Uzziah (2 Chr 27:23).

22. In fact, there are no full proper names preserved in any of the Silwan inscriptions; only a few letters appear in *Silw* 1 and 4.

is never stated. She is identified by her social role and, given the patriarchal society of Jerusalem during the Iron Age this identity is subordinate to that of the royal steward (“his concubine”). It is possible that her name was included in the second inscription (*Silw* 2), which describes the inner space of the tomb. The reconstructed portion of *Silw* 2, offered above, accounts for this possibility, although it is hypothetical. Tomb 35 did contain two chambers, and the excavator cautiously speculated that there might have been a bench wide enough for two bodies inside the outer chamber.²³ The question remains why she was mentioned at all in this inscription.²⁴ One possibility is that the marital relationship between the two individuals was exogamous. If so, the epigraphic source could convey a form of patrimony that differed from the traditional kinship-based society of Judah. Although this possibility is speculative, it finds support in two aspects of the tomb. First, the dead are not identified according to any kinship affiliation, patronymic or otherwise. Instead, their identity is tied to their social status. Second, like the other tombs of the Silwan necropolis, Tomb 35 was not intended for communal burials. It was therefore not a typical Judahite family tomb and did not represent traditional Judahite patrimony.

The two occupants of this tomb, royal steward and concubine, are also identified through reference to their bones. This is a remarkable feature of the inscription. The reference comes in a warning against anyone who opens the tomb. It states that there are no precious artifacts inside, silver or gold, but only the bones of the royal steward and his concubine. A similar warning is found on another Phoenician sarcophagus inscription, that of Tabnit, a king of Sidon, which dates to the early Persian period (KAI 13).

¹⁾ I, Tabnit, priest of Astarte, king of the Sidonians, son of ²⁾ Eshmunazor, priest of Astarte, king of the Sidonians, am lying in this coffin. ³⁾ Whoever you are, any person that comes upon this coffin, you must not ⁴⁾ open my cover and do not disturb me, because they did not gather with me silver, they did not gather with me ⁵⁾ gold, and there are no riches. I alone am

23. Ussishkin, *Village*, 200–201. Other examples of double benches exist in the Silwan necropolis; Tomb 10 has a wide bench with two headrests, side by side (possibly also Tomb 16).

24. The simple answer is because she was buried with her spouse, so her bones reside inside the tomb. But the question remains, since the inscription does not bother to record her name. There are other funerary examples of married couples, such as the statues of a seated couple found at Tell Halaf (Guzana) and dated to the ninth century BCE, which probably served ancestor veneration purposes; see D. Bonatz, *Das Syro-Hethitische Grabdenkmal* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2000), 16, Taf. VI B 9. Another example is KAI 35, a Phoenician inscription from Cyprus that memorializes a husband and wife.

lying in this coffin—You must not open ⁶⁾ my cover, and do not disturb me, because such a thing is an abomination to Astarte! But surely if you ⁷⁾ open my cover, and surely disturb me, you shall have no seed among the living under the sun, ⁸⁾ nor resting place with the Rephaim.

The notion that there were no valuables inside these burial sites is somewhat disingenuous—the one is a royal official's monolithic sepulcher and the other a king's sarcophagus. A better sense of what this means can be gained by comparing the curses of the two inscriptions. While the curse in *Silw* 1 is vague, as is typical for epigraphic Hebrew funerary inscriptions, Tabnit's threat is more explicit. It first states that opening the sarcophagus would constitute an affront to Tabnit's deity, Astarte. The inscription then warns any potential tomb violator in very descriptive terms: they shall not have progeny, nor shall they have a proper burial with the royal ancestors. The curse is directed at the foundations of functional immortality. In other words, the stakes are greater than monetary gains.

The implications of Tabnit's curse highlight the critical nature of the burial place, whether tomb or sarcophagus. The burial place's function was to preserve the dead and maintain their memory. Furthermore, the words of *Silw* 1 make it clear that the most important elements in this monumental, richly decorated sepulcher were the bones of the dead. These observations together underscore a concern for the space of the dead already implicit in the declarations that begin *Silw* 4 and *Silw* 1, "This is the sepulcher (of someone important)," but also explicit in inscriptions such as *Silw* 2. The intention of the inscription is to describe the space of the burial complex in order to carefully mark the presence of the dead.²⁵

Shebna's Tomb and the Silwan Necropolis

Scholars have often associated the royal steward whose inscription once adorned Silwan's Tomb 35 with a biblical figure named Shebna,²⁶ who held this office during the reign of Hezekiah. The basis for this identification is Isaiah's rebuke

25. This aspect of spatiality is evident in other Hebrew funerary inscriptions, such as *Qom* 1, but *Silw* 2 uses specific terms to clarify the extensive area of the tomb, such as "shoulder" (כֹּחַף) and "vault" (צִרְיָה), following Ussishkin, "On the Shorter Inscription from the 'Tomb of the Royal Steward,'" 16–22 and Ussishkin, *Village*, 252–54.

26. Avigad, "Epitaph," 150–52. Avigad attributes this identification to Yigal Yadin, although the idea was first offered (conjecturally) by Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches*, 313. See also L. J. Mykytiuk, *Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.*, Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica (Atlanta: Society of Biblical

of Shebna due to his construction of an ostentatious tomb in Jerusalem (Isa 22:15–19). The interpretation is not without difficulties.²⁷ Yet it is a reasonable suggestion given the prominence of Shebna's tomb, the similar political titles, and the elite nature of the Silwan necropolis.²⁸ The space, monumentality, and location of the Silwan necropolis together serve as the most likely backdrop for Isa 22:15–19, regardless of whether or not Shebna is to be identified with the royal steward in *Silw* 1:1.²⁹ The issues in this prophetic rebuke are spatial, beginning with the tomb, but these issues also involve questions of placing the dead. Each problem can be recognized in Isa 22:16: "What do you have here, and who do you have here, that you have hewn for yourself here a tomb? The one who hews his tomb from on high, the one who inscribes in stone his dwelling!"

The problems raised by the prophet in this verse are twofold: the tomb and its location. The latter issue is stressed through the repetition of "here" (פה) three times.³⁰ The use of this common Hebrew term is evocative of *Silw* 1:2, where the inscription asserts that there is nothing of value "here" (פה) except for the bones of the dead. Regardless of how general the terminology is in these sources, it is important to note their common language because it stresses the critical nature of placing the dead. The Silwan necropolis, with its monolithic tombs, was important because it was the place where the bones of Jerusalem's nobility were stored. Shebna's tomb was controversial for the same reasons, as Isaiah saw it as an inappropriate place for this particular royal steward's remains.

The second part of the problem is that of the tomb. Christopher Hays has identified two issues that Isaiah may have had with the tomb.³¹ First, it was not

Literature, 2004), 253–54 and "The Royal Steward Inscription," trans. P. K. McCarter (COS 2.54:180 n. 2).

27. E.g., the inscription preserves no trace of a single letter of Shebna's name as it is attested in the Hebrew Bible, שבנא; see E. Puech, "Palestinian Funerary Inscriptions," *ABD* 5:127 and Renz, *Die Althebräischen Inschriften*, 1, 263 n. 1.

28. E.g., Mykytiuk, *Identifying Biblical Persons*, 253–54 n. 38 and Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 404, although all acknowledge that the evidence is circumstantial.

29. The prophetic oracle specifically addresses שבנא אשר על הבית 'Shebna the Royal Steward' in Isa 22:15. On this figure, see J. T. Willis, "Historical Issues in Isaiah 22, 15–25," *Biblica* 74 (1993): 60–67 and C. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 233–34.

30. As Hays, *Covenant*, 235 notes, repetition of the term suggests that Isaiah is at the site of the tomb.

31. C. Hays, "Re-excavating Shebna's Tomb: A New Reading of Isa 22, 15–19 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 122 (2010): 558–75; Hays, *Covenant*, 232–49.

a family burial place but a monumental tomb built solely for Shebna. Second, the Egyptian influences apparent in the Silwan necropolis, notably the Tomb of Pharaoh's Daughter, may have played a role in Isaiah's rebuke.³² This second issue assumes that Shebna's tomb was in the Silwan necropolis, which is not known for certain but is probable. The first issue, however, is directly supported by the words of the rebuke. The rhetoric in Isa 22:16a stresses space, repeatedly questioning Shebna's choice of location (פה 'here'). But the second of the two interrogatives implies kinship, as in "Who do you have here?" or "Where is your family?" Within this rhetorical form, the ה indicating ownership, and combined with מי 'who', the phrase can be used in reference to family (Gen 19:12; 33:8).³³ The criticism is thus directed at Shebna's decision to build his own tomb rather than choosing interment in a family tomb. This is consistent with the tombs in Silwan, which were individual funerary monuments rather than communal burial sites.

The questions in Isa 22:16a are followed by a description of the tomb. Twice it is stated that the tomb is "hewn" (בצור), which may indicate something more than creating a cave-like structure. The description also states that the tomb was carved out of the heights, or "on high" (מרומים), suggesting that the burial monument was visible and ostentatious.³⁴ Silwan's sepulchers are both free-standing and monolithic, carved out of the bedrock.³⁵ Thus the tombs of this necropolis fit the description in Isa 22:16, as Shebna's tomb would have held a prominent position directly across the Kidron Valley from the City of David. Unlike other cemeteries, such as those in the Hinnom Valley and the northern necropolis, which were probably obscured in Jerusalem's urban topography because they were largely underground and unobtrusive, the standing monuments of Silwan would have visibly marked ancient Jerusalem's eastern horizon. Moreover, in Jerusalem's other elite cemeteries, such as Saint-Étienne and Ketef Hinnom, the mode of burial was collective. Yet individual tombs were not only a hallmark feature of the Silwan necropolis, they were also

32. Hays, *Covenant*, 236–38, 237, fig. 5.2.

33. Hays, *Covenant*, 236–38.

34. Alternatively, this may indicate that Shebna's tomb is higher than other burials; see T. Ganzel, "Isaiah's Critique of Shebna's Trespass: A Reconsideration of Isaiah 22.15–25," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (2015): 471 n. 9, citing commentaries. This is, however, a misreading of the term, and the reference to height does not imply that the tomb was near (or even on) the temple mount, as Ganzel (475–79) argues. The interpretation finds no archaeological support in Jerusalem. Finally, Isa 22:15–25, unlike Ezek 43:7–9, does not refer to purity concerns.

35. Ussishkin, *Village*, 283–89.

displayed on a grand scale. Based on these factors, it is reasonable to place Shebna's tomb in Silwan, even if his tomb is not to be identified with Tomb 35 (the royal steward's tomb).

The cultural significance of placing the dead is evident in the poetry of Isa 22:16b, where "tomb" (קבר) and "dwelling" (משכן) are parallel. The parallelism extends to their construction as well. The tomb is hewn from the heights, referring to its prominent position, while the dwelling is "inscribed" in stone. The latter case uses a verb (חקק) that can convey writing as well as engraving, or chiseling. The clause continues to emphasize the importance of place, and the specific term that is used in parallel with tomb, "dwelling" (משכן), conveys a sense of permanent residence. But the clause does not build up the dwelling place; rather, it assigns it to him (Shebna) through inscription. Given these observations, it is possible that the allusion here is to publicly visible funerary inscriptions. Hays has further suggested that the rebuke is framed by allusions to Shebna's funerary monument found in the terms סכן (Isa 22:15) and מצב (Isa 22:19), which he translates as "stele" and "monument," respectively.³⁶ The ambiguity of both terms led Hays to argue that they indicate some form of stele, comparing the former to Ugaritic *skn* (see *KTU* 1.17 I, 26–34), and associating the latter with derived forms from בנן that mean either "standing stone" or "pillar" (see 2 Sam 18:18). The architectural feature in question would represent the entirety of the tomb in Isaiah's poetry. This type of feature could also carry an inscription naming the dead, as part of the tomb's visible façade, thus claiming its monumental space for posterity. In their present state, none of the Silwan tombs include stelae.³⁷ But given that this necropolis was marked by monumentality, with richly decorated tombs, Hays's stelae interpretation is reasonable.

The description of Rachel's place of burial also provides a salient analogue for Shebna's monument in Isa 22:15–19. In Gen 35:20, Jacob buries Rachel in her own tomb and erects a stele over it, thus it is called מצבת קברת רחל 'the pillar of the sepulcher of Rachel'.³⁸ As noted, the wording in this verse compares with the opening lines of *Silw* 1 and *Silw* 4, where the feminine singular noun (קברה) is used in construct with the proper name to mark the owner and occupant of the sepulcher. But the "pillar" (מצבת) also plays a role in the marking of the matriarch's burial place. The cognate term in Phoenician (*mšbt*) is used for specialized stelae, or "pillars," that memorialized the dead. One group of

36. Hays, *Covenant*, 232–33, 237–43, esp. 232 n. 133. The terms are usually interpreted in relation to Shebna's political role, hence NRSV translates them as "steward" and "office," respectively.

37. Again, it should be stressed that much of the Silwan necropolis was quarried in antiquity.

38. Hays, *Covenant*, 241.

Phoenician memorializing pillars, from Umm al-Amad in Lebanon,³⁹ closely parallels the opening syntax of *Silw* 1 and 4. Though Hellenistic in date and thus later than the Silwan inscriptions, the Phoenician inscriptions from Umm al-Amad begin with a demonstrative particle (albeit attached to the object), which is in construct with the personal name.

Umm al-Amad 10, line 1	<i>zmšbt b'šmr</i>	"This is the pillar of Ba'al Shamir"
<i>Silw</i> 4:1	[זאת] קברת ז[--]	"This is the sepulcher of Z--"

Certainly these inscriptions are historically and geographically removed from one another. But the point of the comparison, as well as the inclusion of *Isa* 22:15–19 in this discussion, is to gain a better sense of the epitaph as genre. The common practices of remembering the dead meant not only inscribing their names but also declaring their physical presence through the demarcation of their privileged space.

The Tomb Inscriptions of Khirbet el-Qôm

Multiple tomb inscriptions were discovered at the site of Khirbet el-Qôm, west of Hebron. These funerary writings in Hebrew were found in two tombs, both dated to the late eighth or seventh century BCE.⁴⁰ The first two inscriptions identify the dead person in one particular chamber (*Qom* 1–2 in Tomb I), while the third includes a blessing (*Qom* 3 in Tomb II).⁴¹ The first two inscriptions

39. M. Dunand and R. Duru, *Oumm el-'Amed, une ville de l'époque Hellénistique aux échelles de Tyr*, République libanaise Ministère de l'éducation nationale Direction générale des antiquités Études et documents d'archéologie (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1962), 181–90.

40. The tombs were in fact looted, and some of the inscriptions first appeared on the antiquities market. They were eventually traced to Khirbet el-Qom, where the initial salvage excavation established their provenance; see W. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from Khirbet el-Kôm," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40–41 (1970–71), 139–204 and Dever, "Qôm, Khirbet El," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 1233–35. In his edition of the Qôm material, Ahituv, *Echoes*, 220–33, esp. 226–33, included several short inscriptions that appeared on the antiquities market and were purportedly from the site. These inscriptions were published by J. Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 198–206. Yet, as Ahituv notes, their provenance "has not been firmly established" (*Echoes*, 220). Because of these unresolved issues, my treatment here will not fully engage these additional inscriptions.

41. See the editions in Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 325–34.

are shorter than the third, but they contain basic elements that are useful for understanding the function of funerary inscriptions at Khirbet el-Qôm.

Qom 2

Belonging to Ophai son of Nethaniah.

Qom 1

¹⁾ Belonging to Ophai son of

²⁾ Nethaniah.

³⁾ This is [his] chamber.

The inscriptions of Tomb I consist primarily of the occupant's name. Indeed, the epitaphs are almost identical and were closely associated with one another, engraved at the entrance of Chamber 3.⁴² Unlike the Silwan inscriptions, the Khirbet el-Qôm funerary inscriptions were located inside the tomb, and *Qom 1–2* marked the entrance to one of the chambers. Thus the inscriptions were not public declarations. Instead, their purpose was to establish individual space inside the collective surrounding of the bench tomb. Tomb I at Khirbet el-Qôm consisted of a central chamber that contained access to three side chambers. Chambers 1 and 2 were accessed along the north side of the central chamber to the right of the entrance, while Chamber 3 was at the far end of the central chamber opposite the main entrance. The individual chambers each bore three benches, carved out of the sides of the chamber opposite the entrance. Chambers 1 and 3 have carved headrests at opposite ends of each bench, and both contain a repository carved under one of the benches. Chamber 2 lacks these features, which may indicate that it was unfinished.⁴³ Only Chamber 3 has extant inscriptions. Within the collective

42. The paleography, which suggests an early seventh-century date, differs only in their mode of writing: *Qom 2* was written in ink above the chamber's lintel, while *Qom 1* was chiseled on the left side of the chamber's entrance and the incised letters were colored with black ink. See Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 153. Two of the unprovenanced inscriptions, said to be from Khirbet el-Qôm, read "cursed be Ophai, son of Nethaniah"; see Ahituv, *Echoes*, 227–28, nos. 5–6. The inscriptions offer enticing data in relation to *Qom 1–2*, but, if authentic, it is unclear where they would have been situated. Were they originally located near Tomb I? What was their relationship to Tomb I and its inscriptions? These questions are impossible to answer.

43. It is also possible that more chambers were planned for the southern side of the tomb, to the left of the central entrance. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 157 noted that there was much graffiti on the southern wall and he included drawings of a few Hebrew letters. Among these letters is כח (see the next note). To speculate further, if the tomb was left unfinished, the letters (and the single term of kinship) may have indicated the planned organization of the tomb during expansion.

environment of Tomb I—which included multiple chambers, burial benches, and repositories—it is clear that one of the chambers belonged to Ophai son of Nethaniah. This is not necessarily inconsistent with Tomb I's interpretation as a family tomb. It simply indicates that one of the chambers belonged to Ophai and his direct descendants, who were likely one wing of an extended family. Thus the function of writing here is to define more clearly the relationship of the dead to the interior space of the family tomb.⁴⁴

The most notable of the funerary inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm is that of Tomb II,⁴⁵ which includes an invocation of Yahweh alongside Asherah.⁴⁶ The inscription names the dead, Uriah, in its divine invocation.

Qom 3

- 1) Uriah the prosperous, his epitaph:
- 2) Blessed be Uriah by Yahweh
- 3) and from his enemies, by his Asherah, save him.
- 4) (Written) by Oniah.

This inscription has several remarkable features,⁴⁷ most notable of which is an invocation of divine protection that includes an ambiguous reference to the

44. The word “father” (אב), inscribed in the main chamber of Tomb II, on a wall that did not have a side chamber, may suggest a similar use of writing to delineate space—here, for the purpose of planning an additional chamber for family relations in a joint household.

45. Although space prohibits a full bibliography, see M. J. Suriano, “Death, Disinheritance, and Job’s Kinsman-Redeemer,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 53–56. See also A. Lemaire, “Les inscriptions de Khirbet El-Qôm,” *Revue Biblique* 84 (1977): 597–608; S. Mittmann, “Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu,” *Zeitschrift für die Deutsche Palästina-Vereins* 97 (1981): 139–52; Z. Zevit, “The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 255 (1984): 39–74; Zevit, *Religions*, 359–70; J. M. Hadley, “The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription,” *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 50–62; B. Margalit, “Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qôm,” *Vetus Testamentum* 39 (1989): 371–78; and Schmidt, *Materiality*, 144–63.

46. In addition to Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 327–32, see also “Khirbet el-Qom,” trans. K. McCarter (*COS* 2.52:179); S. Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew*, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 23 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 412; and Schmidt, *Materiality*, 156–62. The drawings of Dever, Lemaire, and Mittman are reproduced by Zevit, “Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription,” 40–44, figs. 1–5, along with his own; see also Zevit, *Religions*, 359, fig. 5.5 and the drawing produced by Hadley, “Khirbet el-Qom Inscription,” 52.

47. One of the unusual features is the doubling of certain letters, which is discussed at length by Schmidt, *Materiality*, 158–62 and more briefly by Zevit, “Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription,” 44. The possibility that the doubling of letters represents some numinous function is explored in depth by Schmidt, although the evidence for such practices remains elusive.

goddess Asherah.⁴⁸ The inscription is also accompanied by a carved drawing of a hand with fingers spread and facing downward (see fig. 16). The fact that the inscription mentions two different personal names is still more unusual. Although common in Phoenician funerary dedications such as the Ahirom sarcophagus, the reference to two individuals by name in *Qom 3* is unique among Hebrew funerary inscriptions. Yet *Qom 3* is peculiar even in comparison with Phoenician inscriptions because the relationship between the two named individuals is left unexplained. Nothing in the inscribed text indicates any kinship ties between Uriah and Oniah. This ambiguity requires an explanation that takes into consideration the inscription's context and its literary features.

The subject of the writing is made clear from the very first word, which is the name Uriah. This name occurs twice, beginning with line 1, where it is stated that this is his (Uriah's) inscription,⁴⁹ followed by the second line, where the name is the object of the benediction. Although the second name, Oniah, is less clear, I have interpreted it as the name of a kinsman or close associate who was responsible for Uriah's burial.⁵⁰ The two names, and the relative symmetry of their occurrences in this text, indicate the roles they played in the production of writing. Uriah's name occurs at the beginning and is followed by a clause that says the inscription is "his epitaph." Oniah's name comes in the final line of the text,⁵¹

48. Some scholars question whether אֲשֶׁרָה is a reference to the goddess Asherah because that interpretation involves a possessive suffix attached to a personal name, which is not common practice. This form does have parallels in the Hebrew inscriptions of Kuntilet Ajrud almost a century earlier (*KAjr* 14:2, 18:1, 19:7, and 20:1); see Zevit, "Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 44–46; Zevit, *Religions*, 400–405; and M. S. Smith, *Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed., Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 118–25.

49. Zevit, "Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 43–44. An alternative is to read כתבה as a verb ("[he] wrote it") rather than a noun. Hadley, "Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," 53 favors this reading but states that 'Uriah "could have had someone else inscribe that which he had dictated, and yet still state that he 'wrote it' (cf. [2 Kgs 10:1])."

50. Suriano, "Death," 53–56.

51. Below the image of the hand there is a second inscription, albeit one that is usually treated as part of *Qom 3*. The writing here is more difficult to read:

1). [. . .]	[. . .]
2). "and by his Asherah	ולאשרה
3). his Asherah."	א[ש]רתה

It is unclear whether this was meant to be a second part to *Qom 3* or a separate invocation of the deity; see Hadley, "Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," 60. The inscription was illicitly removed prior to the site's excavation; as a result, the lower portion is heavily damaged.



FIG. 16 Qom 3. Author's image.

where it is marked by a preposition that indicates his instrumental role in the writing of the epitaph.⁵²

The purpose of the two names, as I have argued elsewhere,⁵³ is to distinguish Oniah in relationship to the dead by specifying that his role in creating the epitaph for Uriah entitled Oniah to some degree of inheritance. The obligations that are assumed by Oniah, which may have included burying the dead, are comparable to the kinsman-redeemer who is the one who will attend to Job after his death (Job 19:25). This interpretation highlights the relational aspect of mortuary practices. The dead and their care played a critical role among the living. Moreover, the care for the dead in this instance involved the invocation of Yahweh. The divine blessing shows that Yahweh was not separated from the dead and that his protection extended to the tomb.⁵⁴

The precise nature of the divine invocation is not made clear. The two deities are called to bless and “save” Uriah from his enemies. The inscription

52. The preposition here does not indicate the object, as in “for . . .” or “on behalf of . . .”

53. Suriano, “Death,” 53–56.

54. J. D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

does not include a curse, nor does it offer any description of the dead beyond the initial identification. Still, its apotropaic function can be compared with the imprecations in the Silwan funerary inscriptions. The purpose was the preservation of Uriah's identity, which begins with the recording of his name for posterity. The subsequent benediction extended to the protection of his physical remains inside the tomb. The inscription's iconography has also been associated with protection. The hand drawn below the inscription is generally understood to have an apotropaic function. The image's power to avert evil and the inscription's invocation of divine protection work together to guard the presence of the dead. The memory of the dead and the preservation of their physical remains are one and the same. Some have suggested that the hand represents Uriah's memorial.⁵⁵ In classical Hebrew, one word for "memorial" is "hand" (יד), as seen in 2 Sam 18:18 and Isa 56:5. In this case, the memorial for the dead man would take on a particular form of embodiment (a hand), staking his claim inside the tomb and maintaining his memory.

The Inscriptions of Khirbet Beit Lei Tomb 1

The epigraphic remains from the excavated tomb at Khirbet Beit Lei (fig. 17) are as unusual as the tomb and its remains. The writings inside the tomb do not refer to the dead, neither directly (e.g., personal names) nor indirectly (e.g., the mention of bones). Most scholars have therefore concluded that these writings were not funerary but prayers and curses written as graffiti by refugees hiding inside the tomb. The context of the writing suggests that they were funerary inscriptions, but their unusual elements require explanation. The analysis of these elements, the words and images inscribed on the walls of Khirbet Beit Lei Tomb 1, will offer rare insight into the ideological role that the place of burial played in Judah.

55. Hadley, "Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," 60–61, citing 1 Sam 15:12; 2 Sam 18:18; Isa 56:6; and 1 Chr 18:3. In the article's postscript, Hadley (61–62) suggests that the hand symbol is apotropaic, based on her work directly with the artifact at the Israel Museum, as well as a parallel with a scarab seal. The two explanations, however, are not mutually exclusive. The hand symbol could have served both as a mnemonic device that embodied the posterity of the dead and as a protective sign that guarded their memory; see also Renz, *Die Althebräischen Inschriften*, 1, 206. More recently, Schmidt, *Materiality*, 151–52 looked carefully at the apotropaic interpretation, but he also raised the possibility that, as a memorial, the downward-pointing hand signifies the vulnerability of the dead, writing: "in contrast to the upward or 'heavenward'-positioned human hand expressive of praise and petition, the earthward hand may have concomitantly signified the loss of the deceased (here, Uriah's) ability to petition or praise YHWH from the other side of the grave" (Schmidt, *Materiality*, 152–53).

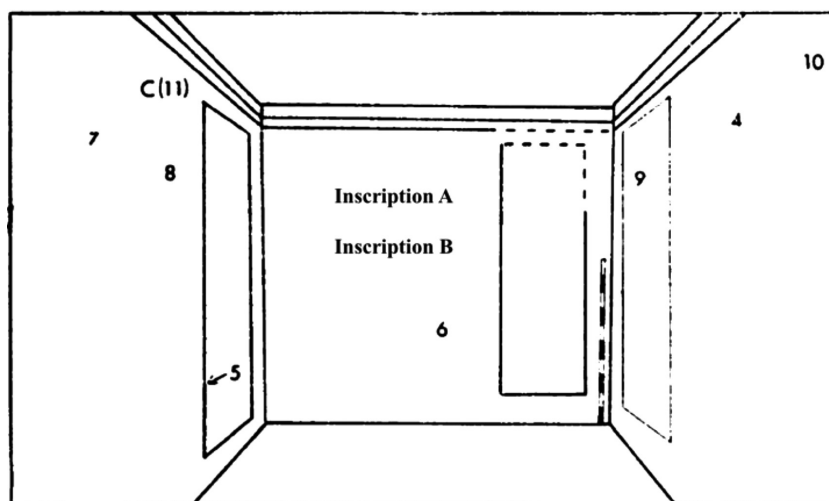


FIG. 17 Interior of Tomb 1, Khirbet Beit Lei (Naveh 1963, 73, fig. 3). The numbers and letters mark the placement of inscriptions and iconography. Permission granted by the Israel Exploration Society.

The refugee hypothesis discussed in the previous chapter is found in most editions of the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions.⁵⁶ But, as previously discussed, this interpretation is ultimately unconvincing. There are no additional artifacts that would indicate that people once took refuge inside Khirbet Beit Lei Tomb 1. Furthermore there is no convincing explanation why anyone would want to inscribe a series of short curses and blessings inside a cave. Even less compelling is the idea that the imprecations were tied specifically to the tomb's iconography. This suggestion depends on how the images are interpreted, and it is much more plausible to read them as funerary. One study has suggested that the Khirbet Beit Lei iconography is the prototype for imagery that appears in tombs during the later Second Temple period.⁵⁷ In particular, the boat motif at Khirbet Beit Lei is similar to the engraved drawings at Jason's Tomb in Jerusalem, although Khirbet Beit Lei is much earlier. The boat motif may symbolize an idea of transition at death. Ultimately, the refugee interpretation founders because it has no real parallel.⁵⁸

56. The most detailed treatment of this thesis is found in Zevit, *Religions*, 435–37.

57. A. Mandell and J. D. Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16 (2016): 245.

58. To be sure, Zevit, *Religions*, 351–71 draws parallels between a cave inscription near En-Gedi and the tomb inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm. The former is anomalous, whereas

The setting of the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions inside Tomb 1 is a critical factor when considering their purpose. The meaning of the tomb should not be detached from the writings inscribed upon its walls.⁵⁹ Alice Mandell and Jeremy Smoak have recently shown that the texts spatially demarcate the tomb's interior in a way that frames the experience of all who enter.⁶⁰ The texts that are inscribed on the tomb's walls utilize imprecatory language that is not uncommon for funerary inscriptions.⁶¹ Of the seven inscriptions, four bear the word ארר 'cursed' (see *BLei* 1–4). Two of the inscriptions contain only this word (*BLei* 2 and *BLei* 4), while the other two are a bit more specific (*BLei* 1 and *BLei* 3). The former reads: "Cursed be [the] one who [ef]f[ac]es" (אֵין־מַחָה אֶרֶר [אֶשֶׁר]) The intention of this imprecation is to protect the writing inside the tomb, as well as the iconography. The second imprecation is less clear, although it could be read as a curse against anyone who curses the dead or challenges the claims made by the living in the name of the dead. The two-line inscription (*BLei* 3) reads: "Cursed be he who reproaches you" (אֶרֶר חֲרַפְכָּ). Another possibility is that it is protective of Yahweh and the invocation of his name, as the divine name is inscribed elsewhere inside Tomb 1. Regardless of their specificity, the function of the written curse is to map out the tomb's space. The two main inscriptions are situated across from the entrance, and there they command the line of view as one enters the tomb. One (Inscription A) is written above the other (Inscription B), and both invoke Yahweh by name. The text and translation here follows the reconstruction of André Lemaire.⁶²

the latter is unambiguously funereal. The En-Gedi inscription (*EnGd* 2:1) was found in a cave that was not a tomb. The inscriptions numbered 4–7 in Ahituv, *Echoes*, 226–30 may constitute funerary examples of cursing an individual. But the authenticity of these sources is uncertain. Typically, curses in funerary inscriptions are general and not directed at anyone in particular. In the end, however, Zevit's analysis is invaluable because the themes found in all of these inscriptions relate to common forms of cultural identification, despite their varying genres.

59. With the exception of Zevit's interpretation of the tomb's interior as ritual space, most studies have reduced the tomb to nothing more than a hiding place where prayers were written.

60. Mandell and Smoak, "Reconsidering," 205–7. See the spatial analysis of the Khirbet Beit Lei cave inscriptions in Zevit, *Religions*, 405–37.

61. Mandell and Smoak, "Reconsidering," 199–200.

62. A. Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976): 558–68; see also "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," trans. P. K. McCarter (*COS* 2.53:180). The difficulties in the epigraphy have resulted in several suggested readings; see, e.g., Zevit, *Religions*, 405–35. My reading of Inscription B differs from the translation found in the editio princeps, J. Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963): 74–92. The difficult nature of the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions can be seen in Naveh's later publication "Hebrew Graffiti," 197–98 in

BLeI 5 (Inscription A)

- 1). "Yahweh is the God of all the land. (The)
- 2). hills of Judah belong to the God of Jerusalem."

BLeI 6 (Inscription B)

"Attend (to us) Yah, O gracious God! Acquit Yah, O Yahweh!"

What is unusual about these inscriptions is that they do not contain any references to the dead inside the tomb. Instead the two main inscriptions (A and B), though difficult to read, make evocative statements about the national deity (Yahweh). The relationship between the tomb and the inscriptions should be addressed in light of these statements. Scholars occasionally turn to biblical passages such as the Psalms to understand the divine motifs in the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions.⁶³ These parallels are often used to explain the refugee hypothesis, though they do not offer strong support. In fact, the most fitting biblical parallel ultimately supports a funerary reading, even though the biblical example is not funereal. In *BLeI* 6 (Inscription B), the combination of terms and divine epithets is analogous to Exod 34:6–7.⁶⁴ The strikingly similar terminology in *BLeI* 6 and Exod 34:6–7 touches upon transgenerational themes that compare with the symbolic importance of the dead inside a multigenerational burial site such as the Judahite bench tomb. The significance of the parallel between this biblical passage and *BLeI* 6 will be examined further in chapter 5, but here the shared terminology will be discussed in relation to Tomb 1.

The deity is described in both *BLeI* 6 and Exod 34:6 as a "gracious God," and the divine name is repeated, albeit in abbreviated form, in the

which he revisited the inscriptions he first published and reviewed subsequent attempts to translate them. He rejected יהוה in the second line of Inscription B but acknowledged that his alternative (לה יהוה) was problematic. Although Naveh found Patrick Miller's (and Lemaire's) reading of פקד in Inscription B plausible, he could not accept it on epigraphic grounds. But Naveh's epigraphic grounds for rejecting this reading were unconvincing, and even he admitted that his alternative reading (המקריה) makes little sense. He attempted to explain this problem by suggesting that the line was intentionally cryptic due to the magical purposes of the writing, but this does not inspire much confidence in his reconstruction. The interpretation proposed by F. M. Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. J. A. Sanders (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 299–306 differs greatly from that of Naveh and Lemaire. It creates problems with the recognizable letters and is too speculative in supplying additional letters in the spaces.

63. See, e.g., Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," 86.

64. P. Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions," in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 267 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 210–32.

inscription.⁶⁵ Both sources also have strong transgenerational implications, although nuanced differently. In *BLeI* 6, Yahweh is benignly invoked to remember and acquit, whereas in its biblical parallel (Exod 34:7), the Israelite deity does not acquit but instead remembers transgressions.⁶⁶ But the implication of *BLeI* 6, and its use of this specific set of verbs (נָקַד and נָקַח), is that Yahweh's sovereign power extends across generations and is inclusive of the dead. Its binding force allows a people, here an unidentified kinship group, to align itself across generations through modes of identification that are tied to the tomb. Their deity is invoked inside the tomb, remembering the conditions that entitled the kinship group to the burial site, along with any accompanying privileges. This is the significance of *BLeI* 6. Inscribed on the walls of a tomb, the evocative words construct the space of the dead and serve as a reminder of the transgenerational promises implied by their presence.

The proclamation in Inscription A is presumably meant to be read before Inscription B, an epitaph that introduces the national deity and provides context for the tomb and its claims. Yet it might be more accurate to describe these claims as furtive, because of the tomb's unfinished state. In fact, all of the unusual features of the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb should be understood as the result of this interrupted state. The burial site is a typical Judahite rock-cut tomb with two chambers that included hewn benches. But there is evidence that a third chamber was planned on the northern side of the antechamber.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the benches held primary burials: the skeletal contents on the benches were undisturbed, with the remains of five people in the western chamber and three in the southern.⁶⁸ Oddly, there are no ceramic remains inside the tomb accompanying the dead. The absence of any trace of pottery, even sherds, suggests that the dead were not provisioned during their primary interment.

The curious and exceptional aspects of the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb should be factored together in its interpretation. The tomb has burial benches typical of Iron II Judahite funerary architecture, but it lacks repositories. Although

65. McCarter notes that this divine epithet occurs also at Kuntillet Ajrud (*KAjr* 20:2); see "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," trans. P. K. McCarter (*COS* 2.53:180).

66. In the verses that follow the divine attribute in Exod 34, Moses supplicates himself before Yahweh, asking that he make Israel his inheritance (vv. 8–9). Yahweh agrees to a covenantal relationship (v. 10) and reiterates the promise of land given to the patriarchs (v. 11).

67. An outline of an opening to a third chamber is evident on this wall. Zevit, *Religions*, 407 notes that the inscription on the northern wall was disturbed by the carved outline, indicating that the inscriptions appeared in an early phase of the tomb's construction and use.

68. N. Haas, "Human Skeletal Remains in Two Burial Caves," *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963): 93–96 and Zevit, *Religions*, 405.

repositories were not always found in Iron II bench tombs, given the unfinished nature of the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb, it is possible that a repository was planned but ultimately never built. The unconstructed third chamber could have included these features, but stonecutters could just as easily have augmented the existing chambers with a repository. The fact that the burials were undisturbed indicates that secondary rituals were never performed in the tomb. There were no skulls placed on the floor at the feet of the benches, as seen at other cave tombs that lack repositories, and virtually no grave goods. The few exceptions were pieces of jewelry that were most likely worn by the dead. If this interpretation is correct, it would indicate that grave goods were not initially placed inside the tomb at the time of the primary burial. If no secondary burial was performed, it may also explain why there are no inscriptions referencing the dead. The inscription of names and the provision of goods may have been acts that were performed at a later stage, such as the liminal period prior to or during secondary burial.

The interpretation of the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb as an unfinished burial site is supported by the evidence of the tomb itself. The tomb's date cannot be determined with certitude, due to the paucity of artifacts, but its architectural features and the paleography of the inscription both suggest a date in the Iron IIIA. Based on this general dating, and given the tomb's unfinished state, I propose the following historical interpretation of the Beit Lei tomb. The tomb was part of a larger Judahite effort to resettle the lowland hills during the late seventh century, contemporary with the developments at Level II of Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) and following the national catastrophe that Judah experienced in this region in 701 BCE (witnessed in Lachish Level III). The effort to reclaim the Shephelah would have been aborted with the rise of Babylonian power. As a result, certain rituals were probably never performed inside the abandoned and unfinished tomb, such as inscribing the names of the dead, feeding the dead, and reburying their remains elsewhere inside the tomb.

The tomb's role in reconstituting a Judahite cultural presence in the lowland hills during the late Iron IIIA is supported by the theological claims made in *BLeI* 5 and *BLeI* 6. The covenantal language in *BLeI* 6 is paired with an image of Yahweh as the sovereign deity over the land in *BLeI* 5. As Lemaire has pointed out, there is parity in the literary structure of *BLeI* 5. I would expand upon this and parse the imagery as follows.

5:1a	a "Yahweh" [divinity]	// b "all the land" [territory]
5:1b-2	b' "hills of Judah" [territory]	// a' "God of Jerusalem" [divinity]

Moreover, the text begins and ends with specific references to the deity: the divine name is the first word, and the last words are “God of Jerusalem.” Yet the specificity in this final reference is territorial, identifying Yahweh as the sovereign deity of Judah’s royal capital. The entirety of the region belongs to Yahweh, thus “all the land” is clarified as the Judahite hills and Jerusalem.⁶⁹ Together with the covenantal language of Inscription B (*BLi* 6), the initial words encountered when one enters the tomb’s antechamber are divine claims that associate the burial site with the surrounding countryside. Yet these claims are more direct, evoking Yahweh’s transgenerational promises that encompass the living and the dead and ultimately relate them to the land. These words are not prayers written by refugees but statements made on behalf of the dead by those returning to the Shephelah.

The Ketef Hinnom Silver Amulets

The last two inscriptions to be dealt with here are the silver amulets discovered at Ketef Hinnom.⁷⁰ The paleography of the amulets suggests that they should be dated to the late seventh century, and this dating is commensurate with the remains found alongside the inscribed artifacts in the tomb.⁷¹ Yet these two

69. The reference to the hills rather than the more specific term for Khirbet Beit Leï’s setting (Shephelah) is poetic.

70. See G. Barkay et al., “The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 334 (2004): 41–71; G. Barkay et al., “The Challenges of Ketef Hinnom: Using Advanced Technologies to Reclaim the Earliest Biblical Texts and Their Contexts,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 162–71; Schmidt, *Materiality*, 123–30; and B. B. Schmidt, “The Social Matrix of Early Judean Magic and Divination: From ‘Top Down’ or ‘Bottom Up’?,” in *Beyond Hatti: A Tribute to Gary Beckman*, ed. B. J. Collins and P. Michalowski (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2013), 279–93. See also the work of Jeremy Smoak on these amulets: Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*; J. Smoak, “Amuletic Inscriptions and the Background of Yhwh as Guardian and Protector in Psalm 12,” *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 421–32; Smoak, “‘Prayers of Petition’ in the Psalms and West Semitic Inscribed Amulets: Efficacious Words in Metal and Prayers for Protection in Biblical Literature,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (2011): 75–92; and Smoak, “May Yahweh Bless You,” 202–36.

71. The seventh-century date is secure, despite the attempts to place it later, in the Persian or Hellenistic periods. See Renz, *Die Althebräischen Inschriften*, 1, 447–56 and the response by Barkay et al., “Amulets,” 50–54. See also A. Berlejung, “Ein Programm fürs Leben: Theologisches Wort und anthropologischer Ort der Silberamulette von Ketef Hinnom,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 120 (2008): 208–12, followed by N. Na’aman, “A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 61 (2011): 184–95 and the response by S. Ahituv, “A Rejoinder to Nadav Na’aman’s ‘A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulet from Ketef Hinnom,’” *Israel Exploration Journal* 62 (2012): 223–32.

texts are not funerary, at least in the strict sense. Unlike the other inscriptions that have been reviewed so far, these were not written on a tomb. Rather, they were engraved upon silver pieces that were then rolled tightly, presumably to be worn as amulets that served apotropaic purposes.⁷² At the same time, they were discovered inside the repository of Chamber 25, in Cave Tomb 24 at Ketef Hinnom. When the person who owned the respective amulet died, the amulet accompanied that person to the tomb. The protective function of the amulets thus extended to both the living and the dead.⁷³ This protective function is conveyed through blessings that compare with Num 6:23–27. The invocation of Yahweh for divine protection is also similar to *Qom* 3, and the study of these amulets will provide insight into relationship between the divine blessings and the individual in death.⁷⁴

KHinn 1

[For PN]-iah . . . ³⁾ the grea[t . . . who keeps] ⁴⁾ the covenant and ⁵⁾ [g]raciousness toward those who love [him] and ⁶⁾ those who keep [his commandments . . . ⁷⁾ . . . ⁸⁾ the eternal [. . .] ⁹⁾ [the³] blessing more than any ¹⁰⁾ [sna]re and more than evil. ¹¹⁾ For redemption is in him. ¹²⁾ For Yahweh ¹³⁾ is our restorer [and] ¹⁴⁾ rock. May Yahweh bles[s] ¹⁵⁾ you and ¹⁶⁾ [may he] guard you. ¹⁷⁾ [May] Yahweh make ¹⁸⁾ [his face] shine

KHinn 2

[For PN, (the son/daughter of) PN-ia]h. May h[e]/ ²⁾ sh[e] be blessed by Yahweh, ³⁾ the warrior and ⁴⁾ the one who expels ⁵⁾–⁶⁾ [e]vil: May Yahweh bless you, ⁷⁾ guard you. ⁸⁾ May Yahweh make ⁹⁾ his face shine ¹⁰⁾ upon you and ¹¹⁾ give you ¹²⁾ p[ea]ce.

The reading of these amulets follows the recent treatment by Jeremy Smoak,⁷⁵ who highlights their parallel with Phoenician silver

72. The analysis of Berlejung, “Ein Programm,” 214–29 attempts to refocus the study of the amulets in order to understand their implications for the living. This is constructive, yet it bears repeating that the importance of the amulets in life was transferred to death when the artifacts were interred with the dead.

73. Schmidt, *Materiality*, 142.

74. The translation here follows that of Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, 18–42.

75. Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, 18–42. See also the treatments in Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 217–25 and Ahituv, *Echoes*, 49–55, as well as in “The Ketef Hinnom Amulets,” trans. P. K. McCarter (*COS* 2.83). Na’aman, “New Appraisal,” 189–90 reconstructs בית at the end of *KHinn* 2, line 7, reading lines 7–8 (ביתו עולם דען) as “his house is everlasting,”

amulets.⁷⁶ The parallel includes their medium—the amulets are made of silver—as well as the terms used to invoke divine protection. In the parallels that Smoak discusses, an invocation using *brk*, *šmr*, and *nšr* is made on behalf of an individual identified by name. Although damaged and difficult to read, the two amulets from Ketef Hinnom both began with personal names. This is certainly the case with *KHinn* 2 and is highly likely with *KHinn* 1, where the remaining letters in line 1 (יהו-) probably represent a theophoric suffix. The Phoenician parallels were also discovered inside tombs.⁷⁷ Regardless of what their roles may have been among the living, the context of these Hebrew amulets (along with their Phoenician analogues) requires that they be discussed in relation to the dead.

The function of the amulets can be compared with *Qom* 1, which invokes divine protection on behalf the dead. On one level, the comparison of *Qom* 1 with *KHinn* 1–2 indicates once more that during this period (Iron IIB–Iron IIIA) Yahweh’s power was thought to extend to the realm of the dead.⁷⁸ The deity’s blessings and protection continued for his adherents in death as in life. The idea of divine care here is most likely broad and generally applicable. But the inclusion of these words within a mortuary setting, particularly on amulets worn by the dead, indicates the importance of the decedent’s physical presence. The inclusion of the amulets among the mortal remains and grave goods in the repository of Cave Tomb 24 underscores the significance of the individual, even in collective burial practices. To preserve one’s name in writing was also to preserve one’s memory, regardless of whether this was on a tomb inscription or a personal amulet. Similar to those in the royal steward’s tomb in Silwan, the bones of the dead here at Ketef Hinnom were important. Their presence inside the tomb was carefully guarded, along with the memories associated with them.⁷⁹

although this reading is improbable according to Aḥituv, “Rejoinder,” 227–30 and Schmidt, *Materiality*, 132–35. Yet it is curious, considering that בית עלים means “tomb” (Eccl 12:5; see also the DAPT, Combination B, line 6, as well as the Ahirom sarcophagus [KAI 1:1], where it is abbreviated *b’lm*). A variation on this term is found also in Ps 49:12, discussed in chapter 7.

76. Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, 44–52.

77. Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, 52–58.

78. Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, 54–55, citing M. Leuenberger, “Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant: A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Hīrbet El-Qom and the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos: Teil 2,” *Biblische Notizen* 141 (2009): 74. Schmidt, *Materiality*, 142 makes a similar point.

79. The writings on the Ketef Hinnom silver amulets are comparable in their most basic elements with seals discovered inside Judahite tombs (including Ketef Hinnom Cave Tomb 24). In both sets of artifacts, individual names are inscribed on objects that could be worn

The physical presence of the dead is underscored by the parallel between the two silver amulets from Ketef Hinnom and Num 6:23–27 because their blessing formulation is related to the body.⁸⁰ In each example, Yahweh is asked to “bless” (ברך), “protect” or “keep” (שמר), and let his face shine upon the subject (see Num 6:25, יאר יהוה פניו אליך, ויחנך). The priestly blessing ends in the divine statement “And they shall place my name upon the sons of Israel, and I shall bless them” (Num 6:27). Smoak has shown that the use here of the verb שים with the preposition על (בני ישראל) when found in other biblical texts indicates placement on the body (see Exod 29:6; Lev 8:8).⁸¹ The amulets thus embodied blessings that accompanied the individual in life and death. The divine invocation was inscribed upon the body of the dead inside Ketef Hinnom Cave Tomb 24, first as an amulet worn by the corpse (most likely) and then ultimately among the bones interred inside the repository.

Analysis of Hebrew Funerary Inscriptions

The appearance of inscriptions at this stage of Judah’s history is part of a wider trend in writing seen throughout the Iron Age kingdom,⁸² but it has a particular impact on mortuary culture. The inscriptions stress the imperative of safeguarding the dead inside the tomb on multiple levels. The interred are identified by name, and their place inside the tomb is described. Even in the anomalous case of the Silwan sepulchers, the individuality of the dead is guarded and expressed spatially, though in monumental proportions. All

on the body and that were interred with the individual at death. See, e.g., the individual seals found at Beth-Shemesh, Ketef Hinnom, and Mount Zion, published in Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 91–92; Barkay, “Excavations at Ketef Hinnom,” 101; and Kloner and Davis, “Burial Cave,” 108–10, respectively.

80. As stressed by Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, and Schmidt, *Materiality*, the similarities reflect the common cultural background of both the inscription and the biblical passage. In other words, the parallel does not require that Num 6:23–27 date to late Iron IIIA or Iron IIIB, nor does it mean that the silver amulets are the earliest biblical verses. Along these lines, Schmidt’s work raises important questions regarding social location of this manner of apotropaic magic.

81. Smoak, *Priestly Blessing*, 73–77. See also F. Stavrakopoulou, “Making Bodies: On Body Modification and Religious Materiality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2 (2013): 545–47.

82. See W. M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 79–97. Regarding funerary inscriptions, see C. A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 79–81.

of these concerns relate to postmortem existence and the preservation of memory. These concerns also relate to the blessings and curses that are often inscribed on the tomb. Here, the tomb's injunction can be communicated through a single word, "cursed," or articulated in a more expansive invocation for divine protection. The latter examples are important because they show that the dead were not disconnected from their deity. Death was relational, and the corpus of Hebrew inscriptions offers insight into the role of the tomb in this sense. The dead inside the Judahite tomb were dependent upon the living, but they could also count upon Yahweh for divine protection.

SUMMARY OF PART I

A Brief History of Death in Judah during the Iron Age

The remains of Judahite mortuary practices provide invaluable insight into the historical role of the dead in the culture of the biblical writers. The events of the eighth and seventh centuries proved formative for the kingdom of Judah, and the development of the state during this period became intricately tied to mortuary practices. Burying the dead in a particular way became part of being Judahite. Collective interments served to identify ancestors and connect living communities to the surrounding landscape. These actions involved distinct notions of family and religion, and the use of mortuary culture to express these ideas impacted the area long after the Southern Kingdom was destroyed. I offer the following history based on the inscriptions and material culture that have been collected and reviewed up to this point.

The Judahite rock-cut bench tomb developed in the early Iron IIA through Iron IIB, combining certain elements of mortuary practices from the second millennium BCE with new features. The predominant distribution of the bench tomb throughout the Shephelah during this period points to an effort to establish a sense of cultural identity and tie it specifically with the settlement of the area. At first gradual, this initiative was intensified in the second half of the eighth century. Following the Assyrian invasion of the Shephelah in 701, these efforts became concentrated around Jerusalem. During this phase, Jerusalem's urban class elaborated upon the bench tomb's typical design. Initially in the eighth century, if not already the late-ninth, select members of Jerusalem's ruling class built monumental sepulchers to the east of the City of David. Although this necropolis in Silwan contained a small number of tombs, it still generated criticism because its ostentatious nature conflicted with traditional mortuary practices (Isa 22:15–16). By the Iron IIIA, however, Jerusalem's elite embraced and idealized Judahite mortuary culture. Although individual monuments were still constructed by the ruling class in Silwan, the elaborate interiors of the unobtrusive cave tombs at Saint-Étienne and Ketef

Hinnom show how the bench tomb plan could be implemented with great sophistication.

Jerusalem's cemeteries, including Silwan's unique necropolis, combined with peripheral cemeteries and created a network of the dead surrounding the royal capital. At the same time, there was an effort to reclaim the Shephelah during the seventh century. This is suggested by the reuse of bench tombs at sites such as Beth-Shemesh and Tell Beit Mirsim that were otherwise abandoned during this period. But it is also supported by the new burials that appear at Khirbet Beit Lei and Lachish Level II, which also indicate the complicated history of this effort. The desecration of mass burials with pig bones at Lachish, if this interpretation is correct, shows that the effort faced resistance even before it started. The unfinished burials in Tomb 1 at Khirbet Beit Lei suggest that the initiative was ultimately unsuccessful. The inscriptions inside, specifically *BLei* 5–6, reveal the complex ideologies that provided the impetus to resettle the lowland hills. The space of the tomb was transgenerational, the dead were linked with Yahweh, and this link was claimed using nationalist terms. The deity invoked inside this Shephelah tomb is called the "God of Jerusalem."

The appearance of funerary inscriptions beginning in the late Iron IIB and extending through the Iron IIIA signifies the importance of the dead inside the bench tomb. The tomb warnings emphasize the protection of the dead. The space of the dead was to be maintained and respected. Although the bench tomb was collective in its purpose, it was occasionally necessary to inscribe the names of individuals inside, whether it be to protect the dead or to define their space within the collective environment of the tomb when this was required. Writing reveals the relational side of death. For example, in *Qom* 3 the relationship between Yahweh and the dead is evoked in a prayer for protection. But a relationship with the living is also suggested by the addition of a second name at the end of the inscription. Ultimately, the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm (Makkedah), Khirbet Beit Lei, and Ketef Hinnom show the powerful presence of the Israelite deity inside the tomb. This presence indicates that the relational bonds that defined Judahite society, in terms of both religion and society, also extended to the Judahite dead.

PART II

Death and the Afterlife in the Hebrew Bible

Care for the Dead

IN THE HEBREW Bible, the idea of the afterlife was inscribed on the body. This idea, revealed through the treatment of the dead, was rooted in a notion of functional immortality that was prevalent throughout the ancient Near East. An ideal fate ultimately involved the hope of joining a greater collective, the ancestors, which raises the question of how the individual was accounted for in death. Archaeology provides some answers through the study of funerary rituals where the corpse could transition into the aggregate remains of the ancestors. The performance of these rituals by the living on behalf of the dead shows how the process of dying could be managed and how ancestral identities could be formed. The transition involved in death can also be traced in literary sources that contain descriptions and discussions of the dead, and dedications for deceased individuals. My analysis of these written sources will complement the archaeological view of the transformation of the dead body offered in part I. The data gleaned from this discourse offer critical insights into the Hebrew Bible's concept of the afterlife. The treatment of the dead and the discussions that surrounded the dead body—care for the dead—reveal important aspects of death, dying, and the nature of the tomb.

This chapter begins by looking at how the dead were individually embodied through ritual action. By looking at how the self, described in Hebrew as נפש, is involved in death, we can begin to see more clearly the relational contexts that allowed the individual to join the ancestors. Ritual care for the dead brought together the living and the ancestors, providing both framework and context for understanding death in the Hebrew Bible. Key here is the marginal state of the corpse, given the transitional status it endured during a process of dying, as revealed in the study of funerary rituals in chapter 1. The study of the dead self, or soul, in biblical and inscriptional sources reveals important aspects of this marginality and complements what we know of death's relational significance from the archaeological sources. The marginality of the corpse was described as a problem of unfixed identity, as the body hovered

between life and death, no longer alive and not yet an ancestor. This chapter will show how the liminality of the corpse could be defined in relation to the living, for example as a defiling object. These definitions provide a context for the dead because the body is discussed in terms of who buried the corpse and who cared for the dead body. The general context can then be used to establish an understanding of how the living claimed the dead as their own.

All the texts examined here are drawn from the Hebrew Bible and the larger corpus of Northwest Semitic inscriptions. The sources will be limited to those occurrences where נפש refers to a dead body or where נפש stands for the persona of the dead, with a few exceptions. The selected biblical texts will show that the liminality of the corpse is directly related to forms of control. Judahite mortuary practices were designed as a means of controlling death through the ritual space of the bench tomb. Biblical purity laws were likewise intended to control the liminality of death by drawing careful boundaries around the corpse. We will begin by considering biblical laws regarding corpse impurity and restrictions on food for the dead, as well as inscriptions that describe feeding the dead. In these sources—both biblical and extrabiblical—the dead who are cared for by the living are often referred to by the term *soul* (נפש, and נפש/nbš in Aramaic). I will examine the nuances of this Hebrew term, along with the problems involved in its interpretation.¹ These sources, whether biblical purity laws or Aramaic instructions for feeding the dead, describe the soul within ritual settings. The soul is embodied in different forms in these rituals, as either an impure corpse or a stele inscribed with the name of the dead. Phoenician inscriptions that remember the dead will make up a third group in this study. These sources do not use the term נפש to refer to the

1. A speculative and ultimately unproductive approach is to analyze the word based on its root in Semitic languages and take its nuance of “throat” or “gullet” as its core meaning. All abstract meanings would then be understood as derived from this substantive form, encompassing the throat’s physical ability to eat and drink (and hence sustain life). As the source of breathing, the term would also become tied specifically with existential qualities. See, e.g., W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 2:134–35. Yet it is possible to posit the opposite, that the word’s abstract sense led to its substantive meanings. One of the earliest attestations is seen in the Sumerian gloss ZI “life” for *nu-pu₃-uš-tu-um* in a third-millennium text from Ebla, cited in G. Pettinato, “The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 39 (1976): 50. Likewise, in biblical Hebrew this nuance, “life,” overlaps with “self-expression” and “existence” when it is used with the pronominal suffix. E.g., in Jonah 4:3, the prophet asks that Yahweh take his “soul” because he feels that his imminent death is preferable to his life. Here, the synonymous parallelism is built between נפש and חיה (where the latter term is contrasted with מית), yet the meaning of the former term runs deeper. For a fuller discussion of the various nuances, with an emphasis on “life,” see Horst Seebass, “נפש; Nepeš,” *TDOT* 9:497–519.

dead, but do they shed light on the Hebrew and Aramaic sources because the Phoenician inscriptions describe the things that were done for the dead. The actions of the living performed on behalf of the dead in all of these sources reveal important information about the relational context of the self in death.

Care for the Defunct Soul

The question of the soul is a significant challenge in the study of postmortem existence.² This question is particularly vexing in the Hebrew Bible because of how scholars have understood the lexeme נֶפֶשׁ. Use of the English word *soul* to gloss this Hebrew term is problematic because it evokes a metaphysical sense that was foreign to the world of the biblical writers.³ The נֶפֶשׁ can perish, which distinguishes it from the Platonic and later Christian concepts of the immortality of the soul.⁴ The נֶפֶשׁ in biblical literature is unlike Plato's ψυχή, which is bound to the body and released at death.⁵ This dualism is predominant in Western thought, from Augustine of Hippo to the ontological argument of

2. See J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 42–46 and the responses by R. Di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 218–19, and J. D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 110–13. See also M. Bauks, ““Soul-Concepts” in Ancient Near Eastern Mythical Texts and Their Implications for the Primeval History,” *Vetus Testamentum* 66 (2016): 181–93. I would like to thank Mark Smith for drawing my attention to the last article.

3. In fact, the classical definition of *soul* is more closely approximated in rabbinic Hebrew (as well as modern Hebrew) with the term נִשְׁמָה, which otherwise carries the nuance “breath”; see N. Rubin, *Time and Life Cycle in Talmud and Midrash: Socio-anthropological Perspectives*, Judaism and Jewish Life (Boston: Academic Studies, 2008), 130–33. Biblical scholars have often been reticent, if not outright opposed, to the interpretation of נֶפֶשׁ as “soul”; see Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:135–36. On the problems involved, see Seebass, “נֶפֶשׁ; Nepeš”; Barr, *Garden*, 36–47; Levenson, *Resurrection*, 110–11; and R. C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription*, Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Near East Monographs (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 1–11.

4. The fact that the נֶפֶשׁ can be threatened (Ps 6:3) or even die (Exod 21:23; Lev 24:17; and Num 23:10) does not necessarily imply that it has a mortal essence that stands in contrast to our modern notions of immortality. Rather, these texts reveal the existential qualities of the נֶפֶשׁ.

5. The Greek concept before Plato involved different types of souls, as reflected in a range of terms extending beyond ψυχή; see Bauks, ““Soul-Concepts” in Ancient Near Eastern Mythical Texts,” 182–83; citing J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

René Descartes.⁶ A previous generation of biblical scholars sought to distinguish the soul in the Hebrew Bible by understanding the נפש as a monistic entity consisting of a unified soul and body.⁷ But this too is problematic, as I discussed at the beginning of the book. There are passages in the Hebrew Bible that talk of body and נפש as separable entities.⁸ Monism fails to explain the intricate nuances of the word.⁹ If we want to understand what נפש means in the Hebrew Bible, we should study it in its own context rather than imposing outside concepts. The body provides such a context, but does this mean the נפש was simply a lifeless body in biblical texts such as Num 19:13? We can begin to understand the embodiment of the נפש by first looking at how two different scholars of the past century described the body in relation to the soul: Johannes Pedersen and Michel Foucault.

Pedersen's intricate psychosomatic unity provides a constructive example of how we should study the נפש within a context of culture.¹⁰ Unlike the typical monistic theories of his time,¹¹ Pedersen offered a different perspective that

6. J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 7–17. On the distinction between Platonic thought and the Cartesian dichotomy of body and mind, see D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3–37.

7. Cooper, *Body*, 34–49.

8. For instance, possibly 1 Kgs 17:17–24, see S. L. Cook, “Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel,” *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 668. The general point is noted by several biblical scholars who otherwise eschew dualistic readings of the term; see Barr, *Garden*, 42–43, and Cook, “Death, Kinship, and Community: Afterlife and the חסד Ideal in Israel,” in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 504 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 107.

9. The general rejection of dualism begins with the roots of modern biblical criticism in the works of Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza. Cooper, *Body*, 17–22 compares Hobbes's materialism with Spinoza's “dual-aspect monism.” The problem of a body-soul dichotomy also plays a role in reconciling the soteriological implications with concepts of physical resurrection, especially among some twentieth-century Christian theologians. For instance Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, The Ingersoll Lecture, Harvard University (London: Epworth Press, 1958), rejected the Greek (Platonic) dualism in the Old Testament but replaced it with an equally problematic view of life and death that was heavily critiqued by Barr, *Garden*, 23–29.

10. J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1:180.

11. See, e.g., R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1:56. Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:135 (italics his) states: “First and foremost the word [נפש] means ‘life’, and what is more, in contradistinction to [חיה], life bound up with a body.”

began with the soul as the defining feature of the body.¹² Setting aside the problems inherent in his linguistic determinism, the underlying approach in Pedersen's work was one of totalities, and this approach made him more attentive to the cultural modalities surrounding biblical concepts such as the soul. Pedersen rejected a "materialistic" dichotomy, but he did see the soul as the context for the body.¹³ Rather than the soul inside the body, Pedersen saw the soul as outwardly expressed in bodily action, asserting that the "flesh is soul."¹⁴ The sentiment here is unique, and its underlying assertion that the soul defines the fleshly body is comparable to the famous words of Michel Foucault:¹⁵ "the soul is the prison of the body." Foucault's statement deliberately overturned the classical notion of the soul as imprisoned in the corruptible confines of the body. In Foucault's definition the soul is not a spiritual entity that is released from the body at death. The modern soul is the result of the implementation of corporal power, a concept Foucault referred to as *political anatomy*,¹⁶ and it is apparent not only in how the body is constructed but also, more specifically, in how it is perceived and portrayed historically. The result was his redefinition not just of the soul but also of the body in Western society.

The work of both Pedersen and Foucault suggests that cultural concepts of the body can be defined in terms of the soul. In Foucault's modern example, the soul of a criminal could be disciplined through physical means such

12. According to Cooper, *Body*, 20 n. 36, Pedersen's monism was a spiritual type rather than a materialist one.

13. Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:99–104; see Barr, *Garden*, 43.

14. Note the full quote from Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:176: "when considering all this we are face to face with the consequence that flesh is soul, or rather that the soul may be flesh, and this in reality is the exact exposition of the Israelitic [*sic*] manner of thinking." The paragraph represents a somewhat strained attempt to reconcile the conceptual nature of the body within biblical discussions of the soul, concluding with a conventional explanation that the two stand apart hierarchically. Pedersen's monism here contrasts with Platonic dualism, while acknowledging the distinct nature of both flesh and soul. The unifying principle, however, is that the one (soul) defines the other (flesh). The soul is not trapped in the body but assigned bodily form in passages such as Ps 84:3 (84:2, Hebrew). Barr, *Garden*, 43 says of Pedersen: "he magnified the importance of soul, filling the whole world with souls, and making body into a kind of soul rather than the reverse."

15. M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 30. The analogy is not meant to awkwardly compare Foucault's "discursive regimes" with Pedersen's psychological approach to language (or, hardly, his outmoded concept of "Hebrew mentality"). The comparison shows instead how the concept of the soul can be related to the treatment of the body.

16. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28–30. The full quote from page 30: "the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body."

as incarceration. In Pedersen's biblical examples, the soul could be embodied through physical action.¹⁷ In the Hebrew Bible the soul can touch (Lev 5:2, 22:6), and it can offer sacrifices to Yahweh (Lev 2:1); it could do things that affected its status as pure or impure.¹⁸ The idea that the soul is culturally ascribed through bodily practices compares also with the work of Mary Douglas. In her words:¹⁹ "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived." As does Foucault, Douglas operates with the assumption of a dualistic ontology. Her statement is found in the opening sentence of a chapter titled "The Two Bodies," which deals with the conceptualization of the body through cultural practices. Her intention here was not to define (or redefine) the soul, but her work extended to the book of Leviticus and established foundations for understanding the symbolic importance of the body in certain sectors of Israelite society.²⁰ In priestly literature, the body was strictly regulated, with controls placed on what went into it (dietary laws), what came out of it (blood, bodily emissions), and what it could touch (tactile concerns). Through these restrictions, it becomes possible to compare the biblical system of corporeal regulation, what Howard Eilberg-Schwartz called the *government of the body*, with Foucault's political anatomy.²¹ The tactile concerns regarding physical contact with the dead are especially important because they provide examples of an embodied נפש. In these examples, the evidence of purity regulations suggests different settings, or social frameworks, for exploring how the self was understood in death.

The biblical regulations of the body in pentateuchal literature are founded upon an elaborate system of purity. Because the general goal of purity systems was the avoidance and removal of defilement, the nature of the נפש, its essential qualities, and its defining characteristics were left largely unstated. Therefore, a glimpse of how the self in death was perceived can be gained

17. Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:105.

18. Pedersen *Israel*, 1:105 cites Lev 2:1, 5:2, and 22:6.

19. M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 72.

20. Beginning with the important work by M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1970); see also Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 158 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

21. H. Eilberg-Schwartz, "People of the Body," in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. H. Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 20–21.

only by carefully picking apart the literature.²² In some ways, the subjects of death and biblical impurity are inextricable. The corpse, according to the rabbis, was one of the “fathers of impurities” (*m. Kelim* 1:1) and in medieval commentaries it is even referred to as the “father of the fathers of impurities.”²³ Modern scholars have also argued that the common element underscoring most, if not all, forms of purity was the symbolic power of death.²⁴ If purity was a response to death, it was because death was a constant problem and an uncontrollable reality. The idea of corpse impurity recognizes this problem and attempts to control it. But is this impurity symbolic or physical? Douglas understood the physical body to reflect its social environment, so she approached impurity allegorically.²⁵ Her work was significant in that it moved away from idealist-rationalist tendencies in explaining the physiological substance of impurity. In its place, she introduced structural methodologies that looked at impurity in Leviticus as a threat to social order.

Like the structuralist studies of mortuary practices that were once popular in archaeology (the representationist approach), Douglas offered a

22. David Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 115–28.

23. I want to thank Hayim Lapin for this reference.

24. Jacob Milgrom, citing anthropological studies, once wrote: “the common denominator . . . is that impurity is associated with the sphere of death.” J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 102. The suggestion itself, that impurity symbolized death, is found in some earlier scholarship, as acknowledged by Milgrom, “The Rationale for Biblical Impurity,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 22 (1993): 109 n. 16. Milgrom rejected Douglas’s symbolic reading of purity, proposing instead that it represented a priestly prioritization of life and the living. For a discussion of Milgrom and Douglas, and the problems with their respective systematic approaches to purity, see T. M. Lemos, “Where There Is Dirt, Is There System? Revisiting Biblical Purity Constructions,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37 (2013): 265–94. One encounters problems when this theory is applied to the wider phenomenon of purity regulation beyond corpse defilement. See, e.g., the review in C. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 305–7.

25. For Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 35–41, impurity was a problem of disorder in the structure of society, so dirt symbolized defilement. Furthermore, corporal integrity (or “wholeness”) symbolized order, so anything that threatened this integrity could be considered impure (51–54). For a critique of Douglas’s system of dirt and defilement, see T. M. Lemos, “The Universal and the Particular: Mary Douglas and the Politics of Impurity,” *Journal of Religion* (2009): 236–51; Lemos, “Where There Is Dirt,” 265–94; and I. Feder, “Contagion and Cognition: Bodily Experience and the Conceptualization of Pollution (*tum’ah*) in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 72 (2013): 153–54. On Douglas’s connection of purity with wholeness, see S. M. Olyan, “Mary Douglas’s Holiness/Wholeness Paradigm: Its Potential for Insight and Its Limitations,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008): doi:10.5508/jhs.2008.v8.a10.

well-organized approach that was ultimately limited by the questions it asked. Social attitudes inscribed upon bodies do not necessarily negate the embodied realities of impurity.²⁶ The recognizable changes in the body could affect various cultural responses. For example, in secondary burials the decomposition of the corpse served as both prompt and guide for ritualized action. Just as the bench tomb functioned as a controlled environment for the ritualization of death, impurity regulations could implement control over the corpse. Biological transitions that greatly impacted society, events such as childbirth and death, carried strong defilements not just because of their impact but also because they were difficult to control and relatively unpredictable. This is not to say that impurity was driven entirely by biological factors. Nor is it to assert the opposite. Instead, it is the acknowledgment that impurity was a form of control that was both physical and symbolic.²⁷

A corpse was deemed impure in order to control it. The concept of impurity here was not a response to death that rejected it as the enemy of life. The underlying concern here was not one of complete separation. In these texts the attitude toward death derives from liminalities that were recognized in the body.²⁸ The purity regulations surrounding the *ṭāḥ* in the texts reviewed in the next section (Lev 21:1; Num 19:11–13) were not designed to create discrete theological categories that separated Yahweh, as the living deity, from the chthonic realm. The regulations likewise do not reflect a polemic against

26. The social boundaries in Douglas's system were defined by physical realities of the body, such as the mouth and other orifices, that facilitated intake (eating) and emissions; see Lemos, "Where There Is Dirt," 270. Feder, "Contagion and Cognition," 155–66 rejects Douglas's allegorical system and draws on cognitive linguistics to argue for the "embodied rationality" of impurity. That is, the visible imperfections of skin diseases and rotting corpses were central components in determining impurity.

27. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 319 and A. Faust and H. Katz, "The Archaeology of Purity and Impurity: A Case-Study from Tel 'Eton, Israel," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 27 (2017): 17–20.

28. Here, the more nuanced approach of G. Eberhardt, *JHWH und die Unterwelt: Spuren einer Kompetenzerweiterung JHWHs im Alten Testament*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) is preferred. While she argues for the expansion of Yahweh's dominion, her emphasis on the liminal boundaries allows for richer understanding of the complexities involved in Israelite/Judahite religion and the conceptualization of death. The liminal boundaries of death that I argue for reflect sociological categories that apply to religion among other things. It is possible that separating Yahweh from death played a role in some forms of Israelite religion, given its plurality during the Iron Age; see Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001). But the ideas of a separated cosmos and the creation of discreet theological categories were never the driving forces in the conceptual relationship between impurity and death impurity.

ancestor worship or some similar form of the cult of the dead.²⁹ The biblical concepts of purity and impurity were concerned with maintaining boundaries. Death was a transition, so the threshold between the living and the dead had to be negotiated through purity laws that governed how the living cared for the dead. The נַפֵּשׁ existed in this threshold as a defunct soul, a deceased person who had left the living and had begun the transition to the ancestors. In this marginalized state of being, the individual—the self—can be recognized in biblical texts that regulate corpse impurity.³⁰

The נַפֵּשׁ as Defunct Soul in Leviticus

In the Hebrew Bible the first use of נַפֵּשׁ to signify a dead body appears in Leviticus. The passages are found in the corpus known as the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26), beginning with Lev 19:28, where the Israelites are told that they are not to lacerate their skin “for [any defunct] soul” (לַנֶּפֶשׁ).³¹ The forbidden actions are not given any further description, but the rendering of נַפֵּשׁ as a dead person (or corpse) is commonly accepted. The term is encountered next in Lev 21:1, where it introduces a passage (Lev 21:1–6, 11) that regulates practices that entail corpse contamination. By extension, the condition of the sons

29. This breakdown is inherent in Milgrom’s correlating dichotomies of life/death and pure/impure, where the priestly regard for life is on one side, opposed on the other side by death as the root cause of impurity. The problem with this system is its overarching application to all forms of impurity. To cite one odd example, Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 650 explains that pork was taboo because pigs were connected with cthonic deities. Although he offers no examples to support this assertion, the basic idea is one of a divided cosmos with Yahweh ruling the living and separated from the netherworld. B. Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 468–79 offers a similar view, arguing that corpse contagion is the only impurity that is completely separated from the cult of Yahweh. Unlike other impurities, there is no expiatory ritual performed in the presence of the Israelite deity. Although this observation is useful, his suggestion founders on the problems typically involved in putative Israelite cults of the dead, which he defines as a type of ancestor worship (Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 472–73). Funerary rituals hardly offer solid evidence for the reconstruction of this phenomenon. The assumption behind the theories of both Milgrom and Levine about the impurity of the dead was similar to the history of Israelite religion in which deified ancestors are gradually replaced by so-called official Yahweh worship, as argued in works such as J. Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-mortem Existence,” *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995):1–16.

30. I follow J. Bottéro’s definition of *defunct*: “[death’s] victims ‘decease,’ ‘become defunct,’ i.e. in the etymological sense of the words ‘cease to fulfill their roles’ and ‘retire from the functions’ that they occupied on the economic, social and political levels.” Quote from Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 268.

31. Grammatically, it is pointed as “for the soul.” But the article generalizes the noun, here specifically a dead person, in a distributive sense that is clarified in the next few verses.

of Aaron is restricted if they touch someone “who has contacted any impure soul” (והנגע בכל טמא נפש) in Lev 22:4b. The primary purpose of these passages is to limit the exposure of the priests to corpse impurity, but what emerges from this proscription is a general outline of how the living interacted ritually with the dead.

Leviticus 21:5 revisits the problem of laceration, first mentioned in 19:28, but here the list of prohibited mourning practices is expanded. This verse is part of a larger passage that begins in Lev 21:1b by enjoining the priests not to make themselves impure “for a defunct soul” (לנפש). Although the details are elusive, the passage certainly encompasses the wider range of practices involved in caring for the dead. The injunction in Lev 21:1 does not ban such practices outright, which is an important point because it implies that it was permissible in certain situations to interact with the dead. The implication at the beginning of the passage (v. 1) is that the priests cannot make themselves impure except in situations that involve their family. These exceptions—those for whom the priests could provide care for the dead—are listed in verses 2–3 and consisted of close family members (לשאריו הקרב אליו).³² The restrictions are followed in Lev 21:5 by a more stringent ban on mourning practices, which includes shaving heads, cutting beards, and laceration (see Lev 19:28). Finally, Lev 21:11 prohibits the high priest from association with any dead soul.

The consistent feature of the prohibitions and regulations in Lev 19:28 and 21:1–6 is an implied sense of performance. The act of defilement is left unexplained, although the absolute abolishment of certain mourning customs makes it clear that shaving and cutting one’s flesh were never allowed and thus not part of the acceptable activities implied in Lev 21:2–3.³³ In other words, certain acts of defilement were permissible for the priest in particular cases and on behalf of specific people. He was permitted to care for the dead only in cases that involved his family. He could defile himself *for* his parents, *for* his children, and *for* his brother and unwed sister. In each instance, beginning with the general prohibition of Lev 21:1 (לנפש), the acceptable category of

32. Leviticus 21:4 is less clear due to the ambiguity of בעל בעמיו. This expression is often interpreted and translated in a way that forbids the Levite from making himself impure on account of his wife’s death. For instance, JPS: “But he shall not defile himself as a kinsman by marriage, and so profane himself.” J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1791, however, translates this verse “But he shall not defile himself among his kinspeople, thereby desecrating himself” (see also his discussion on 1800–1801). He takes בעל to be a repetition of בעמיו, forming an inclusion with 21:1 around vv. 2–3.

33. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1796. Elsewhere, he observes that Lev 21:12 would prohibit the high priest from following the funerary bier; see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 277.

the dead is marked by the *-b* preposition. The implication of the preposition is one of purposeful action directed toward the dead, actions that would render the ritual agent unclean.

The strict boundaries that separated the living from the dead were regulated through the body, and in Lev 19–21 this separation was also maintained in the severe penalties for necromancy (Lev 19:31; 20:6, see Lev 20:27). But while necromancy is forbidden and banned under any circumstance, the guidelines in Lev 21:2–3 have to do with temporary banishment. These verses allow a Levite to participate in ritual actions on behalf of dead family members, but this allowance meant that the Levites would be ritually impure for a period of time. Care for the dead meant that the Levite could not participate in the ritual cult of Yahweh until corpse contamination was removed.³⁴ In Num 19:11–22 the process of purification lasted for seven days. A reasonable inference from the precepts listed in Lev 21:1b–4 is that they were intended to limit the potential situations that would render a Levite ineligible for ritual duty. This interpretation finds further support in the ban on bodily practices of mourning in 21:5. Each practice physically marked the bereaved, and these physical markings would have remained with the body for extended periods. The Levite may therefore have experienced a liminal status as long as his hair was not fully restored or while his wounds were still healing.³⁵

34. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1796–97 accounts for this possibility and discusses the role of Num 19, which he considered to have been part of Lev 12–15 originally. The liminal time period implied in Leviticus and articulated in Numbers was thus intended to rid the Levitical cultus of any vestige of chthonic associations according to Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 270–78. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1796–97 also notes that while Num 19:14 and 16 require one week, Ezek 44:25–27 requires two. He takes this inconsistency to represent an earlier stratum of concern with corpses, which he associates with the cult of the dead. But the extra week in Ezekiel reflects an extreme sense of purity that is used to define sacred space in the prophet's vision of a New Jerusalem in Ezek 40–48. See J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 60–61.

35. As S. Olyan, "What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish and What Do They Signal in Biblical Ritual Contexts?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 616–17 has observed, shaving is not necessarily connected with purification. The physical change brought about through such acts symbolically abased the individual so that he might mimic, and hence sympathize with, the dead. Both the living and the dead share the same marginalized status in these mourning rituals; see Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39–45. From the perspective of transition rituals, the manipulation of hair (shaved heads, shorn beards) represents the separation of an individual, his marginalized status, or his aggregation into a new class of identification. The messy boundaries attributed to the ritual role of the shaved or lacerated individual may have more to do with his marginalized status and the liminal time frame within which he is situated. The liminality involved in these customs would have inhibited the ability of the Levites to serve in the ritual cult. It was a question not merely of purity that would have accompanied such

The concern for cultic purity is made clear in Lev 21:6, which may add insight into the implied activities of 21:1b–4. The narrative shifts from a specified singular subject in verses 1b–4 to an impersonal plural in verses 5–6. Following the prohibition of mourning practices in 21:5, the next verse states the justification: the priests should remain holy because they bring offerings to the deity. The symmetry of the verse is apparent in the repetition of $\sqrt{\text{קדש}}$ at its beginning and end (v. 6a α // v. 6b β), which emphasizes the point of the regulative ordinances. Holiness, or sacredness, is the theme throughout the Holiness Code. This theme frames a description of the priests' function:

- 6a α). Sacred ones (קדשים) they shall be for their God . . .
 6a β). but they shall not profane the name of their God,
 6b α). for the fire-offerings of Yahweh, [and the] bread of their God
 they bring forth.
 6b β). And they will be sacred (קדש).

The literary dissection of the verse reveals the dedicatory purpose at stake. It is all about the nature of the Levitical priests. They are to remain sanctified for their deity. The Levites belong to the God of Israel, they must maintain their ability to officiate his ritual cult.

How does the Levites' sacred status relate to funerary rituals and mourning practices? The answer can be found by comparing Lev 21:6a with Phoenician dedicatory inscriptions that memorialize the dead. The formulaic opening of dedicatory inscriptions begins with the dedicated object, followed by a third person preterite verb and then a prepositional phrase with an *l*- marking the person for whom the dedication is made. Leviticus 21:6a α likewise begins by fronting the substantive adjective קדשים, followed by the verb יהי and then the prepositional phrase “for their God” (לאלהיהם). The purpose of the Phoenician

mourning customs but also of the symbolic status of the Levite's appearance. Shaving was required of the Levites in their dedication (Num 8).

The time sensitivity of rituals for removing corpse impurity also affected calendrical observance, as seen in the provisions for a second Passover (Num 9:5–13). S. Jacobs, “The Body Inscribed: A Priestly Initiative?,” in *The Body in Biblical, Christian and Jewish Texts*, ed. J. E. Taylor, Library of Second Temple Studies 85 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–16. Such acts of inscribing the body were often seen as a sign of devotion; therefore, these acts might have been seen as at variance with the dedication of the Levites to Yahweh. The creation of scars through acts of mourning may have held transgenerational significance, affirming bonds between the living and their ancestors. This is precisely the type of symbolism the biblical writers sought to circumscribe regarding the Levites. Their devotion was to Israel's deity rather than their ancestors.

inscriptions was to remember the names of the dead, which contrasts with the cultic interests of this biblical verse.³⁶ This contrast suggests why the priests' interaction with the dead had to be curtailed. The Levitical priests' purpose was to venerate the divine name (Lev 21:6aß), and this purpose took priority over the veneration of the dead. Because the Levites were dedicated to Yahweh, they did not inherit land—their sacredness was their patrimony. The connection between land and ancestors did not exist for the Levites. Although they were allowed to care for dead members of their immediate family, the veneration of ancestors through funerary rituals had to be realigned for the Levites so as not to conflict with their unique status in ancient Israel. The sacred status of the Levites was passed down through patrilineal inheritance, but the source of this inheritance was Yahweh rather than ancestors.³⁷

The נפש as Defunct Soul in Numbers

The purity regulations in Numbers generally address one question: What do you do if you come in contact with a dead body? We encounter this problem initially in Num 5:2, when Moses is instructed on how to remove from the camp anyone who has been made impure by a corpse (נפש). This text (as well as Num 19:11–22) assigns a physical presence to the defunct soul that paradoxically counters that of the living. Similar to Leviticus, Numbers contextualizes the נפש within a framework of ritual. These texts do not aim to define the נפש; rather, the word here serves to delineate the boundaries of ritual purity by separating pure from impure. Therefore, in Lev 21:1–3 the term is identified within the setting of a priest's immediate family. A similar description is found in Numbers, regarding the Nazirite (Num 6:6–12). But in Num 19:11–22, the term is used to describe both the living and the dead. In Numbers, the נפש as defunct soul is a substantive form of selfhood that is embodied in the corpse, creating problems of physical contact for ritual purity.

36. The dedicatory inscriptions begin with a noun, followed by a relative particle (absent in Lev 21:6) and then the verb.

37. As H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 204 points out, the special susceptibility of the Levites to impurity could have been related to their social status. That is, there may have been a correlation between the inherited status of the Levite, assigned through right of birth rather than achieved, and the relatively arbitrary nature of birth and death as polluting events. Comparative studies generally support this suggestion; see Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 313 and Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 38–62.

The rule of the Nazirite in Numbers contains a unique example of embodiment regarding purity and death. Like Lev 21:1–6, the purity boundaries in Num 6:6–12 set apart a specific group of people, but they are much more restrictive.³⁸ The Nazirite is forbidden to go near a נפש מת (Num 6:6b), even if it is a member of his immediate family (6:8), although there is no mention of children (see Lev 21:2b). Num 6:7a explicitly states that the Nazirite should not “defile [himself] on account of their deaths” (לֹא יטמא להם במתם) because of his unique consecration. The defunct soul is the dead body of someone that the Nazirite would have normally interacted with through funerary rites, mourning practices, or otherwise (נפש מת in Num 6:6,³⁹ but simply נפש in Num 6:11).⁴⁰ The texts are not meant to define death but to address the role of those alive in response to death, yet their concern for the role of the living is expressed in a manner that offers insight into concepts of mortality and the dead.

The boundaries established for the purity of the Nazirite are embodied in his hair.⁴¹ In this case, purity is not strictly about maintaining the ritual sanctity of a sacrificial cult. It is about the special sacredness of a group of people who are dedicated for divine purposes (לִיהוָה, Num 6:5, 8, 12). Numbers 6:7b makes it clear that this sacredness is defined by the Nazirite’s hair, which is to be unshorn. Expiation thus involved the shaving of his head, removing hair that had become impure through contact with death.⁴² This is done once the Nazirite has completed the seven-day period of impurity removal described in Num 19:11–22. The shaving reinitiates the Nazirite’s vow (Num 6:9b), and the next day—the eighth day—he is required to bring a sacrifice to the priest and reconsecrate his hair (Num 6:10–11). The concerns in this text are expressed physically, in the Nazirite’s hair, and temporally, in the seven-day period for removing impurity.⁴³

38. The restrictions are comparable to the high priest in Lev 21:11. See J. Sturdy, *Numbers*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 51 and Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 221.

39. More specifically, the “corpse of a *defunct* soul.” See similarly, “corpse of a dead person” in Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 221.

40. That is, under normal circumstances if one is not under a Nazirite vow.

41. Olyan, “What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish,” 612–15 and Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 63–102.

42. Olyan, “What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish,” 612–15.

43. In fact, the basic regulation regarding the dead in Num 6:7 is framed through a *Wiederaufnahme* that restates the temporal terms of the Nazirite’s vow: “All the days of his dedication [as Nazirite] to Yahweh” (Num 6:6a) // “all the days of his Nazirite [dedication] he is to be holy to Yahweh” (Num 6:8).

In Num 6:9b–12, the purification requirements are specific to the Nazirite, but they are made necessary by the probability that the Nazirite would come into contact with the dead (v. 6a).⁴⁴ This probability is the driving concern in Numbers with regard to regulating corpse impurity. It was impossible to require complete avoidance of death, so all encounters with the dead had to be regulated. The term נפש is used in these regulations for the embodiment of the defunct soul that creates problems of physical contact. In Num 19:11–22, the purification laws address Israelite society generally, and the problem of corpse impurity is described more expansively to cover any possible encounter with a dead body. Here the term נפש, as a type of body, occurs in the described procedure for removing corpse impurity. In this description,⁴⁵ the term can apply to a person either dead or living (see Num 19:18 [נפשות], 20, and 22). Nevertheless, there is no ambiguity regarding which soul was dead—the text is quite clear on this matter.

In Num 19:11–22 the living and the dead are surrounded by a superstructure of ritual that is formed through the opposition of impure versus pure. Numbers 19 begins: “The one who touches a dead body, for any person’s soul, shall be unclean for seven days” (v. 11; see v. 13a). This is presumably the seven-day ritual period alluded to in Num 6:9b–11. The description of the process in Num 19:11 begins with the substantive use of מה followed by the prepositional phrase לכל נפש אדם. Again ל is used to signify any general care given for the dead.⁴⁶ The preposition implies purposeful action on the part of the person who is in contact with the dead and hence is defiled by the defunct soul. Furthermore, the “person’s soul” in 19:11a (the construct נפש אדם) represents the selfhood of the dead, instantiated within the object that carried defilement.⁴⁷ The explanation of corpse contamination in Num 19:11–13 concludes

44. Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 222.

45. The composite nature of Num 19 is important to note in light of the varied usage of נפש (dead and living) within a single text that has been carefully edited. Note the discussion in some of the older commentaries, such as J. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1903), 254; M. Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, trans. J. D. Martin, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 142–43; and Sturdy, *Numbers*, 137. Although there have been attempts to read Num 19 synchronically, see R. P. Knierim and G. W. Coats, *Numbers*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 223.

46. This use of the preposition is found also in Num 9:6–7.

47. The term נפש אדם can apply to both the living and the dead, hence the translation “for any human being” by Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 465. It is similarly used in Num 9:6–7 for a dead body that causes those who come in contact with it to be excluded from Passover. Yet the same construct term is used for the living, in the description of human war captives in Num

with a causal statement in verse 13a that reiterates and expands upon the brief description of the dead in verse 11a.⁴⁸ That is, נפש אדם in v. 11a is expanded to “a dead body, the soul of any person who will die” בנפש האדם אשר ימות in v. 13a. The initial circumlocution in Num 19:13a can be compared with the more terse reference to the “soul of a dead body” in Num 6:6.⁴⁹ Aside from their subtle differences in nuance, the grammar and syntax of these passages seems to recognize two entities, one a concrete object (“dead body”) and the other an abstract concept (“soul” or “self”). But rather than a duality of body and soul, the implication of this passage is that the embodiment of the defunct soul creates problems of physical contact that require attention.⁵⁰

The purification rules in Num 19:11–22 were meant to safeguard the interaction of the living with the dead for sake of cultic purity. The underlying assumption is that the occasional—and unavoidable—occurrences of death required people to endure ritual impurity. Thus, the references to the dead body imply an object that is at the center of human activity, and it is possible to infer that these actions encompassed both mortuary practices and ancestor veneration, among other potential activities. That is to say, the rituals surrounding the corpse (מת) affirmed the identification of the dead (נפש). Use of the term נפש here does not signal belief in disembodied souls. Rather, the נפש should be viewed as an element of selfhood that is ritually embodied. It is clear that in Num 19:11–13 the נפש/soul is an object that is defined situationally as a dead body. But the situation assigns to the particular נפש a physical presence. The participation of the living in these occurrences—namely, their

31:35, 40, and 46. The sense of נפש אדם in Num 19:11 is one of general (human) personhood; the article on אדם (literally “human”) in Num 19:13 therefore indicates a distributive sense that requires further qualification. Syntactically the referent of the third person masculine singular verb attached to the relative particle (אשר ימות) is האדם. Thus the clause can be rendered: “any *human* who will die.”

48. In terms of the literature and the ritual description, this passage serves as a subunit; see Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 465–66.

49. Following the translation of Num 6:6 proposed by D. Michel, “*nəp̄əʕ als Leichnam?*,” *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 7 (1997): 82–83, “soul of a dead man”; see נפש חיה ‘living soul’ in Gen 2:7. The analogy suggested to Michel that the form in Num 6:6 represented two separate entities (soul and dead body). The rendering here is based on the occurrence of the *qal* participle מת, which compares with the noun אדם (both masculine singular). See chapter 5 for use of the *qal* masculine singular participle מת as a neutral object (specifically a marginalized one) in Gen 23:3ff.

50. The repeated use (six times) of the נגע/נָגַע ‘to strike, touch, contact (physically)’ is significant in this passage. It occurs at the beginning of the unit (19:11) and then twice at the end (19:22).

ritual performance on behalf of the physically present dead person—creates a problem of impurity that the passage seeks to resolve.

As the source of ritual impurity, the physicality of death in Num 19:13a is reinforced through the repeated use of the circumstantial –ב.⁵¹ This syntagma is used earlier in 19:11aα (attached to מֵת) and expresses a problem of proximity, regardless of whether the contact is with the dead generally (בַּמֵּת),⁵² or with a specific person (בַּנֶּפֶשׁ). The idea of proximity is clarified further in Num 19:14–16, which addresses various scenarios in which one might encounter the dead. Beyond the incipit, “This is the instruction” (זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה) in the first part of the verse, Num 19:14 is a continuation of verse 13, which refers to the dead in similar terms but clarifies the area affected by the event of death.⁵³ If death occurred inside a tent, its contaminating properties are enclosed within, affecting anyone inside the tent or in contact with it outside.⁵⁴ The problem of impurity becomes tactile rather than areal—that is, localized within the space of the tent—in Num 19:16.⁵⁵ Outside of the tent’s enclosed space, one becomes impure only through touch.⁵⁶ Any chance encounter with mortal remains, regardless of whether it is a person slain, a dead body in general, or a human bone, renders the living impure for seven days. Similar to Num 19:13a, the problem of physical contact in Num 19:16 (repeated in v. 18b) is expressed

51. The importance of the circumstantial ב in these ritual texts is discussed in more depth below, regarding its usage in Deut 26:14 and line 11 of Katumuwa’s Stele.

52. See chapter 5 for an extended discussion of the masculine participle מֵת (in Gen 23) as a general term for a corpse as opposed to a specifically identified dead person.

53. Compare בַּנֶּפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָמוּת in v. 14 with אָדָם כִּי יָמוּת in v. 13.

54. The fact that closed vessels can be purified has been taken by some as an indication that the presence of the dead could occupy open vessels; see Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:215. Michel, “*næpæš*,” 81–84 took this further, suggesting that the passage was meant to keep the נֶפֶשׁ from seeking another host. These interpretations tend to take the נֶפֶשׁ as a type of ghost, analogous with the Mesopotamian *etemmu* or the later Jewish concept of the dybuk. Alternatively, Feder, “Contagion and Cognition,” 161–62 suggests that the areal association of impurity within pottery inside the tent, and by extension a house, was caused by the smell of the rotting corpse. Note that in some cultures the smell of decomposing flesh plays a role in secondary burial practices; see P. Metcalf and R. Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 56–57.

55. Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 467.

56. “In the open field, all who touch . . .” (וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יַגֵּעַ עַל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה). The commentaries note that “tent” here can apply to any domicile; see Sturdy, *Numbers*, 137 and Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 467. But Levine, *Numbers* 1–20, 467–68 notes further that the impurity of the dead is permanent regardless of whether one stumbles across old bones. I would add that this is a function of the tomb, as it permanently *houses* corpse impurity.

through the use of the circumstantial –ב attached to each defiling object: “And all who touch . . . the slain, or a dead body, or a bone of a person, or a tomb, they will be impure for seven days.”

The tomb (קבר) is the last defiling object listed in verse 16. This is important because here death is defined spatially in the form of the burial site; it is a recognizable place of the dead that can be contrasted with that of the living. Although the burial site is not described further, the rough pairing of the tent at the beginning of the passage (v. 14) and the tomb at the end (v. 16; see also v. 18b) creates a parallel between the enclosed spaces occupied by the living on one side and the dead on the other. This parallel of tent and tomb is consistent with the interpretation of the tomb, specifically the Judahite bench tomb, as a replication of the joint family household. Numbers 19:14–16 pushes the fundamental dichotomies of pure/impure and living/dead further into intersecting spatial categories of closed/open and inside/outside. The spatiality of corpse impurity in Num 19:14–16 reflects the physicality that is assigned to the soul (נפש) in verses 11–13. This physicality can be compared with Aramaic *npš* in instances where it is ascribed physical form in relation to the dead. In Aramaic inscriptions, however, the *npš* was monumentalized in stone rather than ascribed to the dead body.

The npš in Aramaic Inscriptions

The cognates of the term נפש in Northwest Semitic can take on a substantive sense representing the dead, although the nuances vary depending on the historical period or culture.⁵⁷ In later Hebrew, as well as Jewish

57. The nuance of the term in later Jewish sources could specify the tomb's façade. In Old South Arabian, the term *npš* has an architectonic sense that extends to the tomb, but the semantic range is more flexible and can include “funerary chamber.” See S. L. Sanders, “The Appetites of the Dead: The Language of the New Zincirli Stela and the History of a West Semitic Funerary Tradition,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 369 (2013): 88–89, M. Mouton, “Les tours funéraires d'Arabie, *nefesh* monumentales,” *Syria* 74 (1997): 81–98 and P. Clauss, “Les tours funéraires du djebel Baghouz dans l'histoire de la tour funéraire syrienne,” *Syria* 79 (2002): 178–79. Regarding the semantic range of the lexeme, D. Pardee, “A New Aramaic Inscription from Zincirli,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 356 (2009): 63 stated: “it appears not unlikely that it was the fusing of the old Semitic concepts regarding the stele as important in the mortuary cult with later ones such as those expressed in KAI 214 . . . that led at a later time to identifying the *npš* with the funerary monument itself and, in an attenuated sense, with the representation of the deceased on the stele.” The question is whether these nuances can be compared to *npš* where it stands for a corpse in Hebrew. The answer supplied in this chapter is affirmative because the word represents a substantive sense of the self, as an underlying (almost hypostatic) reality, though its objectification may differ according to context.

Aramaic,⁵⁸ נַפְשׁ could mean “cenotaph” or “tomb.” In other forms of Aramaic, including Nabatean and Palmyrene, the meaning of the term *npš* could include a monument for the dead.⁵⁹ Two Persian-period Aramaic inscriptions from Anatolia, Daskyleion and Keseçek Köyü, provide excellent examples of how the term *npš* could represent the reification of the self in a material object.⁶⁰

Daskyleion

- 1). These are the images that Elnap son of Asiya/hu
- 2). made for his *defunct* soul (*npš*). I adjure you
- 4). by Bel and Nabu, anyone who passes by this
- 5). let no one disturb [it].

58. The earliest associations of נַפְשׁ with funerary architecture are in the Copper Scroll (3Q15, col. 1.5), translated as “sepulchral monument” in “3Q15 3Q Copper Scroll,” trans. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (*DSSSE* 1:232–33), as well as the Bene Hēzir Inscription in Jerusalem. R. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 31. In Tannaitic sources, Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 339–53, has distinguished two meanings that hold funerary associations. The first is “tomb” (see *m. Ohalot* 7:1), and the second is a “column-pyramid” that marks burials, often represented in funereal iconography (see *m. Sheqalim* 2:5). Refer to M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. (New York: Judaica, 1989), 1:926, cited by Hachlili. See also Sanders, “Appetites,” 89 n. 20.

59. In Nabatean the term could be used in inscriptions as a reflexive (with pronominal suffix) signifying the self, as well as a “funerary monument”; see F. Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada’in Salih*, Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71 and A. M. Butts and H. H. Hardy II, “A Revised Reading of a Nabataean Inscription from Umm Al-Jimāl,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 55 (2010): 386 n. 6. Importantly, these occurrences are usually accompanied by the *l-* preposition, attached to the reflexive *npš*.

60. The inscription was first published by A. A. Dupont-Sommer, “Une inscription araméenne inédite d’époque perse trouvée à Daskyléion (Turquie),” *Comptes Rendu des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 110 (1966): 44–58. Following the initial publication, it was quickly realized that the inscriptions were related to the dead; see M. A. Hanfmann, “A New Stelae from Daskyleion,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 184 (1966): 10–13; F. M. Cross, “An Aramaic Inscription from Daskyleion,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 184 (1966): 7–10; and J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 2:157–58, 166–67 (no. 37). E. Lipiński, “Obadiah 20,” *Vetus Testamentum* 23 (1973): 368–79 has suggested that the names are Jewish, reading the first two letters of line 2 as the continuation of the Yahwistic theophoric element; see Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics I*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 1 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1976), 150–53. This resolves the problem of inserting an independent pronoun in the opening formula, which is otherwise standard in its syntax.

The term “image” (*šlm*) is fairly common in inscriptions for the dead,⁶¹ but it is usually singular because the referent of the image is the person being dedicated.⁶² The “images” (plural) in the Daskyleion inscription probably refer instead to the iconography adorning the inscribed stele. The images include two figures standing before a horse-drawn chariot, one of whom is presumably Elnap. The singular reference to Elnap’s selfhood is found in the second line where it is expressed with the term *npš*. The line states that he created the images “for his soul.” The inscription thus describes two aspects of Elnap’s efforts to memorialize his name: the images, collectively, and his soul or self (*npš*). These aspects are combined in order to preserve his memory, with the stele and its iconography embodying Elnap’s identity. The stele as a stone monument gave physical form to Elnap’s selfhood and enabled his self/soul to last in this monument long after his death.

A similar phenomenon is seen in another in another Aramaic inscription from Keseçek Köyü in Anatolia, which also dates to the Persian period.⁶³

KAI 258

- 1). This is the relief Nanshati established
- 2). before Adonis, his provider-of-care.
- 3). My *defunct* soul (*npš*) belongs to it. But if anyone evil
- 4). acts destructively with this relief
- 5). may Sahar and Shamash seek him out!

The inscription explicitly assigns the *npš* a physical presence in the *ptkr* ‘relief’ because the relief, which probably was accompanied by an image (now lost),⁶⁴ encompassed elements of Nanshati’s selfhood, chiefly his name. The intention

61. See, e.g., the Neirab inscriptions (KAI 225:3; 226:2), in which *šlmh* ‘his image’ refers to the engraved visage of the dead person on the respective stele. The phenomenon of funerary, or memorializing, monuments depicting the dead feasting in the afterlife was popular during the Iron Age in the Aramean and Luwian cultures of the northern Levant; see D. Bonatz, *Das Syro-Hethitische Grabdenkmal* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2000).

62. Hence, “Sin-zer-ibni, priest of Sahar in Neirab, is dead, but this is his image his burial-place” (*ššnzrnb kmr šhr bnrh mt wznh šlmh w’rsth*) in KAI 225:1–3.

63. The inscription was first published by C. C. Torrey, “An Aramaic Inscription from Cilicia, in the Museum of Yale University,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 35 (1915): 370–74. Subsequent editions include R. S. Hanson, “Aramaic Funerary and Boundary Inscriptions from Asia Minor,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 192 (1968): 3–5; Lipiński, *Studies*, 146–50; and Gibson, *Textbook*, 3:153–54 (no. 33).

64. The inscription was purchased in the early twentieth century. It was originally carved into the side of a cliff overlooking the Berdan River. Torrey, “Aramaic Inscription,” 372 reported that the inscription was said to have been used for target practice by a local Ottoman

was to preserve his name for posterity. This is evident not only in the final curses but also in the term *pqd*, which I have restored in the second line.⁶⁵ The Semitic root *pqd* carries a specialized nuance, meaning “attending to” or “providing care for,” which is found in sources that describe the actions of the living toward the dead. For example, the *pāqīdu*, “caretaker,” in Akkadian was an individual who provided food and drink for the dead and who invoked their names. These sources will be discussed in chapter 5.

The connection between the relief and Nanshati’s soul is described in line 3a. The syntax of this line, where the noun (defunct soul) is followed by the relative particle *zy* linking it with a prepositional form (*l-*), is identical with another Aramaic inscription from eastern Anatolia, the Katumuwa stele, though one that is Iron Age in date.

Nanshati (line 3a):	<i>npšy zy lh</i>	my defunct soul that belongs to it
Katumuwa (line 5):	<i>lnbšy.zy.bnšb.zn</i>	for my defunct soul that is in this stele

The term *npš* in both examples is qualified by the possessive suffix, so the line says “my soul,” which finds further comparison in Elnap’s inscription: *npšh* ‘his soul’.⁶⁶ Thus the element of selfhood is grammatically interlinked with the inscribed name.

The purpose of the Aramaic inscriptions from Kесеçek Köyü and Daskyleion was to establish a permanent form of memory for the dead. Memory and identity are interwoven. The dead person is identified in the image engraved on the

garrison. Thus, there may have been an accompanying image of Nanshati that was either destroyed or left behind by the people who removed the inscription.

65. The second line is broken and difficult to read, leading to several different interpretations, none of which is satisfactory. My reconstruction is based on high-resolution digital images provided by Seth Sanders.

66. In later Nabatean sources, we encounter inscriptions that speak similarly of individuals who construct their own tombs or monuments. In these Aramaic inscriptions, the opening formula is a variation of the dedicatory style that is not unlike those of Nanshati and Elnaph. The formula is curious, though, in that the object and subject are clearly marked (the subject being the personal name of the verbal agent) yet this information is followed by the seemingly superfluous *lnpšh* ‘for his soul’ and a list of family members. E.g., one inscription, H3 in Healey, *Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions*, 86–94, begins: *dnh kpr’ dy ‘bd hšykw br hmydw lnpšh* “This is the tomb which Hushayku, son of Humaydu, made for himself (. . . and for his family).” In this inscription, as with similar Nabatean sources, the dedicatory formula is adapted for a discursive purpose that is tied directly to the monumental tomb. Those encountering the inscription will know that it belongs to Hushayku along with his family. The pronominal use of *npš* indicates the survival of his identity, which—along with the identities of his children, siblings, and other family members—is bound to the monumental words of the inscription. His selfhood is inscribed in the text and enshrined in the tomb.

stone object, his name is inscribed on this object, and this tangible form of his memory is preserved for posterity in the object. The fact that these texts end in curses against anyone who might threaten the inscription reflects the desire to have a long-lasting memory. Unlike the *wn* in Numbers, the *npš* in these inscriptions is not directly related to human remains. Yet in both cases the dead are personified in an object that is attended to by the living. In Numbers, it is the dead body that requires proper disposal; in the Aramaic inscriptions, it is the image and name of the dead, inscribed in stone for future generations to observe.

Feeding the Dead

The regulation of corpse impurity in pentateuchal literature alludes to cultural actions, but they do not offer any detail of what was involved in caring for the dead. Yet there are good reasons to believe that these cultural actions involved providing the dead with food and drink. The reasons begin with the overwhelming evidence from ancient Near Eastern cultures that formed part of the wider cultural background of biblical literature. Aside from the famous passage from Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgamesh, quoted in this book's introduction, Mesopotamian culture also included a type of repast for the dead known as the *kispu* ritual.⁶⁷ Likewise, stelae from the northern Levant during the Iron Age, written in Aramaic and Luwian, bear images of the dead feasting, accompanied by inscriptions that memorialize their names.⁶⁸

There is no evidence that the *kispu* ritual was observed in the southern Levant.⁶⁹ Nor have archaeologists in Israel discovered any monumental stelae

67. The most extensive study of this ritual is still A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenpflege (kispu) im alten Mesopotamien*, *Alter Orient und Altest Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985); see also Tsukimoto, "Aspekte von *kispu(m)* als 'Totenbeigabe,'" in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 129–39.

68. J. D. Hawkins, "Late Hittite Funerary Monuments," in Alster, *Death in Mesopotamia*, 213–25. See also Bonatz, *Das Syro-Hethitische Grabdenkmal*; D. Bonatz, "Syro-Hittite Funerary Monuments: A Phenomenon of Tradition or Innovation?," in *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, ed. G. Bunnens, *Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Supplement 7* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 189–210; and Bonatz, "Katumuwa's Banquet Scene," in *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East*, ed. V. R. Herrmann and J. D. Schloen, *Oriental Institute Museum Publications 37* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 39–44.

69. The *kispu* ritual is not attested in any alphabetic, or alphabetic cuneiform (Ugaritic) source, nor is it found in any cuneiform text from the Levant, for that matter. Hence, it is

that compare with Luwian and Aramean artifacts from the northern Levant.⁷⁰ Yet there is sufficient evidence for the practice, not only found among burial remains,⁷¹ but also referenced in literary sources. Feeding the dead is mentioned in Deut 26:14 and elsewhere (Jer 16:7, with LXX; Hos 9:4; Job 21:25; Sir 30:18; and Tob 4:17).⁷² The literary features and terms found in these texts are comparable with Aramaic inscriptions from Zincirli that refer to food for the dead, specifically feeding their souls. A synthesis of this data—inscriptions, biblical texts, and archaeology—can provide insight into the practice of feeding the dead.

The archaeological data are both abundant and ambiguous. For instance, only in a few instances has evidence been discovered for food itself inside Iron II tombs.⁷³ Yet excavations have revealed a considerable number of ceramic vessels inside Iron II tombs that were used for the preparation, storage, and

important not to refer to any instance of feeding the dead as *kispu*, or even *kispu*-like. For a critical assessment of feeding rituals, the question of the Mesopotamian *kispu* in Northwest Semitic sources, and the putative role of the *marziḥu* (מרזיח) as a funerary repast, see D. Pardee, “Marziḥu, Kispu, and the Ugaritic Funerary Cult: A Minimalist View,” in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture: Essays Presented in Honour of Professor John C. L. Gibson*, ed. N. Wyatt, W. G. E. Watson, and J. B. Lloyd (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 273–87.

70. Stelae for the dead, inscribed in Phoenician and occasionally bearing simple iconographic designs, have been discovered among the Iron II remains of Achziv (al-Zib) north of Akko; see F. M. Cross, “Appendix I: Phoenician Tomb Stelae from Akhziv,” in *The Akhziv Cemeteries: The Ben-Dor Excavations, 1941–1944*, ed. M. Dayagi-Mendels, IAA Reports (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2002), 169–73. There are no analogous artifacts from Judah.

71. E. F. Maher and J. S. Lev-Tov, “Food in Late Bronze Age Funerary Offerings: Faunal Evidence from Tomb 1 at Tell Dothan,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 133 (2001): 91–110 and W. T. Pitard, “Tombs and Offerings: Archaeological Data and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel,” in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place*, ed. B. M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 149–50. For Iron Age Judah, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series 7; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 123 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 105–8.

72. The broad, diachronic range of the biblical texts covers most of the first millennium BCE; e.g., Ben Sira (Sir 30:18) and Tobit are Hellenistic. The practice of feeding the dead spanned the Iron Age to early Jewish history, as is reflected in both the archaeological remains and rabbinic sources; see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 108 n. 1. For discussions of this practice in ancient Israel and Judah, see H. Nutkowitz, *L’homme face à la mort au royaume de Juda: Rites, pratiques et représentation* (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 270–83; and R. Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” in R. Albertz and R. Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 455–59. The Hebrew Bible also contains a few ambiguous references to feeding the dead in Pss 16:3–4 and 106:28 (the latter referencing Num 25:2 and Israelite apostasy in Moab), which present other challenges.

73. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 105–8.

consumption of food and drink.⁷⁴ Thus there is ample evidence for feeding the dead in Iron II Judah, even though the evidence is not enough to establish a firm and detailed understanding of the practice.⁷⁵ This ambiguity is coupled with problems of interpretation. Was the placement of food symbolic or real? Do these remains indicate a type of propitiation,⁷⁶ based on the belief that the dead were powerful and dangerous? Or do the remains suggest a type of comensality that involved the sustenance of the dead inside the tomb?

The basic questions are difficult to answer due to the limitations of the remains,⁷⁷ but the recoverable information is enough to make certain suggestions. The absence of pottery accompanying the primary burials inside Tomb 1 Khirbet Beit Lei seems to indicate that grave goods were placed inside the tomb during the intermediary stage between primary and secondary burial. Multiple aspects of grave goods and their presence inside tombs raise additional possibilities. The first is the placement of items around or near the corpse, either on the bench or on the floor beside the bench. The few documented examples of undisturbed tombs indicate that grave goods were

74. Cook, "Funerary Practices," 678 draws the same conclusion, citing Tomb 11 at Gibeon, for which see H. Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," *Israel Exploration Journal* 37 (1987): 1. Other examples can be cited, such as Tomb 15 at Tel 'Ira; see I. Beit-Arieh and A. G. Baron, "The Cemetery," in *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev*, ed. I. Beit-Arieh (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 155–59.

75. The types of assemblages also reveal change over time. As Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 76 has noted, tombs in the area of Jerusalem and Amman beginning in the late ninth century include wine jars.

76. The question becomes: Are these grave goods meant as offerings, and do they thus constitute evidence for ancestor worship? Scholars have provided different answers to this question. Some account for this possibility; e.g., E. Bloch-Smith, "The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111(1992): 220 and T. J. Lewis, "How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead," in Gittlen, *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 172–76. Others deny that grave goods were offerings in ancestor worship; see B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 10–11, 259 n. 540 and P. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 62–64. Schmidt and Johnston argue that the food is sustenance for the dead in their weakened state. My position is that the grave goods served as sustenance for the dead in their marginalized state, but ultimately the practice was positive in that its outcome was that it sustained the dead in their transition to the collective ancestors.

77. Nor are they helped by the lack of full documentation regarding excavated tombs. Even in the few cases of undisturbed tombs, the excavation reports are not always clear where the findspots were for the various grave goods in relation to the corpse.

clustered around the feet and the head of the body.⁷⁸ This is supported by features in seventh-century tombs that facilitated offerings, such as niches and cup markers carved to next the headrest of the bench.⁷⁹ The second factor is the accumulation of discarded grave goods inside repositories, alongside the disarticulated remains of the dead. Repositories at Tel Ḥalif and Ketef Hinnom were found packed with grave goods and human remains, which shows that these vessels were discarded once they ceased to serve their original purpose. The indication here is that the function of grave goods was limited and related directly to the corpse.⁸⁰

The first two factors, which indicate the temporary nature of the grave goods, compare with a third: the quantity of ceramic vessels discovered inside the tombs. The large number of pots, jars, and plates that were included among the funerary assemblages suggest various associated meanings.⁸¹ For example, the provision of a full range of vessels for cooking and eating may have been related to the notion of the tomb as a house for the dead. That is, the needs of the dead reflected the needs of the living. The quantity of vessels may also indicate a type of commensality that involved the living eating along with the dead. The tombs themselves were typically too small to facilitate a repast of any size. Yet it is not beyond reason to assume some form of feasting that involved the bereaved outside or in close proximity to the tomb.

78. E.g., the Western Hill tomb contained skeletons with lamps at their heads and decanters at their feet; see A. Kloner and D. Davis, "A Burial Cave of the Late First Temple Period on the Slope of Mount Zion," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 107–8. Furthermore, a storage jar was discovered inside Tomb 8 at Beth-Shemesh. Fragments of a storage jar were found scattered along with skeletal remains placed on a bench in a disturbed burial at Tel 'Ira (Tomb 5); see Beit-Arieh, *Tel 'Ira*, 140.

79. A. Kloner, "Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and Its Vicinity," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 19–20 (2001–2): 108 mentions such features in the Western Hill tomb, Silwan Tomb 16, and a tomb near Nabi Samwil. Such features are found also in Tombs 6 and 20 at Tel Ḥalif.

80. A. Biran and R. Gophna, "An Iron Age Burial Cave at Tel Halif," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970): 166–68. In Chamber 24 of Ketef Hinnom Cave Tomb 25, items were placed on the floor near the repository during the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, long after the tomb's period of use. Yet these exceptions do not change the fact that in every case (including Tel Ḥalif and Ketef Hinnom) grave goods were cleared from the bench along with the human remains to be secondarily interred inside the repository.

81. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 75–76. See, e.g., H. Katz and A. Faust, "The Chronology of the Iron Age IIA in Judah in the Light of Tel 'Eton Tomb C3 and Other Assemblages," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 371 (2014): 108 for the assemblage from Tel 'Eton Tomb C3, which included bowls, chalices, and a cooking pot.

The few passages in the Hebrew Bible that mention feeding the dead often associate the food with impurity and are thus comparable to the discussion of impure souls (נפש) found in Leviticus and Numbers. Although the description of impure food in Deut 26:14 does not use the term נפש to denote the dead, it does have a close parallel in another text that discusses feeding the soul: Hos 9:4.⁸² This passage uses food, impure by virtue of its appropriation for the dead, as a metaphor for separation from God. The use of נפש in Hos 9:4 is similar to its use in Leviticus and Numbers, where the word denoting the dead is also a defiling object.⁸³ The words and images in Hos 9:4 also have a parallel in an Aramaic inscription from Zincirli, which specifically directs the feeding of a soul (here *nbš*): the Katumuwa stele. Each of these texts—Deut 26:14, Hos 9:4, and the Katumuwa stele—indicates that feeding the dead was typically conducted within specific ritual parameters.

Deuteronomy 26:14 and the Parameters of Feeding the Dead

In Deut 26:14, feeding the dead is mentioned in a statement that constitutes a vow the Israelites were to make when they brought the tithe (see Deut 26:12–15):

I have not eaten from it while in my mourning, and I have not removed from it while impure, and from it I have not offered [anything] for the dead. I have heard the voice of Yahweh my God, I have done according to all that you have commanded me.

The passage engages multiple levels of purity because the actions involved a type of food (the first fruits, Deut 26:10–12) that was to be dedicated to Yahweh and then distributed among the Levites along with the socially disenfranchised (widow, orphan, and resident alien). The food must be pure before

82. This section captures a further development of my thoughts first published in M. J. Suriano, “Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa’s Stele, Hosea 9:1–6, and the Early History of the Soul,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 385–405. See also Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 122–23; T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 102–4; and Zevit, *Religions*, 664.

83. The ritual propriety of the Levites meant curtailing their invocation of the dead so that they could sanctify the name of their God. Conversely, feeding the dead may have been one of the implied actions covered under the restrictions of Lev 21:1–4, since the Levites were also responsible for feeding the deity. While Lev 21:1–4 does not specify what actions render someone unclean, the purity of divine food offerings is mentioned in Lev 21:6bα.

the God of Israel, and it must not defile the Levites who belong to him. It is essential to understand that this text is about ritual purity, not about the abolishment of putative practices of ancestor worship.⁸⁴

The establishment of ritual boundaries is not surprising given the abundant archaeological evidence for leaving food and other offerings to the dead inside tombs. The declaration in Deut 26:14 suggests that practices of divine offerings, charitable giving, and feeding the dead could overlap and coincide, intentionally or unintentionally. A possible example of such blurred boundaries comes from Tomb 8 at Beth-Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh). An inscribed bowl found inside this tomb has been interpreted as a vessel used for charitable offerings that was appropriated for funerary purposes (see fig. 18).⁸⁵ The inscription reads “your brother” (אחך),⁸⁶ and it was incised on the inside of the

84. Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy,” 6 situates the prohibition within a larger literary framework of cultic centralization in Deut 12–26. Blenkinsopp’s reading rather problematically assumes an evolutionary model of religion in which ancestor worship is gradually replaced by a so-called official religion. Indeed, the issues in interpreting Deut 26:14 often beg the question of ancestor worship, commonly referred to as “cults of the dead.” As a result, scholars like K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 208–10 read the text as a prohibition against feeding the dead, when in fact it is merely restrictive in certain circumstances. The text is an exception that proves a rule—the rule being that feeding the dead was allowed except when it involved food dedicated for the tithe.

85. G. Barkay, “‘Your Poor Brother’ a Note on an Inscribed Bowl from Beth Shemesh,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 41 (1991): 239–41. For the artifact, see D. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems (Beth-Shemesh)* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1913), 87–88, fig. 10.

86. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 87–88, fig. 10. The reading “your brother” was first offered by George Buchanan Gray, whom Mackenzie (80) cites as “GBG.” The reading was tentatively followed by D. Diringer, *Le iscrizioni antico-ebraiche palestinesi*, Pubblicazioni della R. Università degli Studi di Firenze, Facoltà di lettere e filosofia 3/2 (Florence: Felice de Monnier, 1934), 300, no. 11, pl. XXVI. The alternative is to read it as a personal name; see B. Delavault and A. Lemaire, “Les inscriptions phéniciennes de Palestine,” *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 7 (1979): 23–24. As Barkay, “Your Poor Brother,” 240 observes, however, this name would be unattested in inscriptions and biblical literature. He also notes that the inscription is unlikely to mark ownership because personal names indicating ownership are usually on enclosed vessels and inscribed on the outside. Furthermore, the name would have had an affixed $\text{—} \aleph$, denoting possession. The form of the ח is unusual for epigraphic Hebrew, which has led some paleographers to classify the inscription as Phoenician; see Delavault and Lemaire, “Les inscriptions phéniciennes,” 23–24. But one must consider several factors when interpreting this artifact. First, the bowl is a typical Judahite vessel, dating to the eighth century with parallels at Level III of Lachish. Second, it was discovered in the repository of a bench tomb in a Judahite city (Beth-Shemesh), which provides cultural context. Finally, incised inscriptions can take on unusual forms due to the nature and difficulty of the writing. F. M. Cross, “Two Offering Dishes with Phoenician Inscriptions from the Sanctuary of ‘Arad,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 235 (1979): 75–78 also interpreted the similar ח bowls at Arad (which are Iron II) as Phoenician. (See note 88 for these bowls.) This is not to endorse Cross’s reading, which countered that of Arad’s

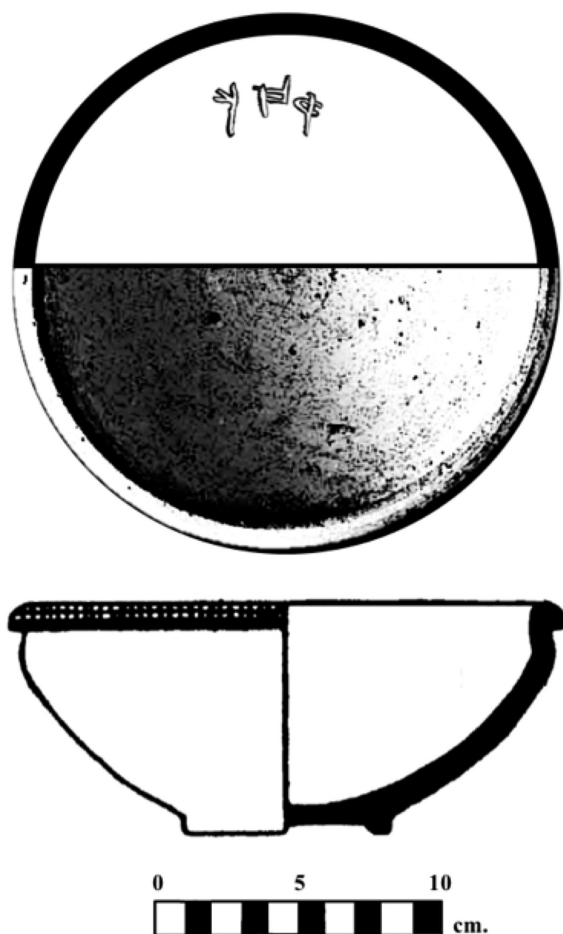


FIG. 18 Beth-Shemesh bowl (image created by the author, based on Mackenzie 1913: 87–88, fig. 10).

bowl after firing.⁸⁷ The bowl has functional parallels in other offertory vessels from the Iron II period, where the purpose of the offering was written inside the bowl.⁸⁸

excavator (Aharoni), but to show that the script in incised writing could be more fluid than in other types of epigraphy. The Beth-Shemesh bowl's epigraphy does not contradict the interpretation of the inscription as Hebrew.

87. Mackenzie, *Excavations at Ain Shems*, 87 and Barkay, "Your Poor Brother," 240.

88. The bowl is comparable to the קדש bowls found at Arad, Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim (unprovenanced), and Hazor, which indicates that the offerings on the plate were "sacred

Gabriel Barkay has compared the Beth-Shemesh bowl inscription more specifically to the term אחיך האביון ‘your poor brother’ found in biblical passages that involve giving to those in need (Deut 15:7–8, 11). The inscribed word marked the bowl as an offering vessel for the poor, and Barkay supported this interpretation by drawing from several biblical examples where the specific gifts (tithes, first fruits, etc.) were designated for different categories of those in need (slaves and servants, widows, orphans, and resident aliens) or for those requiring support (the Levites).⁸⁹ Among these examples, he cited Deut 26:12–13,⁹⁰ though his comparison served to establish the meaning of the bowl rather than relate it to feeding the dead. The bowl, as a vessel for the poor, would have differed from the offerings that are prohibited in Deut 26:14. In the biblical verse, it is forbidden to take food given to the dead and repurpose it as a first fruit or tithe offering. Conversely, the placement of the Beth-Shemesh bowl inside a tomb suggests that it was a charitable offering bowl that was repurposed for feeding the dead.

It is difficult to say much more about the inscribed bowl from Beth-Shemesh. Because it was discovered inside the repository of Tomb 8, its context is limited. For instance, we do not know where in the tomb the bowl was placed before it was removed to the repository. Nonetheless, the parallel between the Beth-Shemesh bowl and Deut 26:14 is intriguing because it strongly suggests that offering food for those in need could overlap with offering food for the dead. The status of the dead would thus be comparable to other groups that required provisioning. The interpretation of the Beth-Shemesh bowl also suggests the type of cultural practice that could blur boundaries and create the sort of problems that Deut 26:14 sought to curtail.

[for the priests]”; see Barkay, “Your Poor Brother,” 240. Another parallel is an offering bowl with the word אֱלֹהִים ‘God’; see W. G. Dever, “Iron Age Epigraphic Material from Khirbet el-Kôm,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40–41 (1970–71): 172, fig. 14, and 173–74. W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) has the individual entries. The Beth-Shemesh bowl should also be compared to the “Korban” כ bowls found in the temple at Arad, for which see Y. Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions*, ed. A. F. Rainey (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 115–17, nos. 102–3. In these examples, the inscription marks types of offerings, and the writing is incised on the inside of the bowl near the rim.

89. Barkay, “Your Poor Brother,” 241 cited Lev 25:6; Deut 14:28–29; and 26:12–13.

90. The comparison with Deut 26:12–13 made in Barkay, “Your Poor Brother,” 241 was to establish the meaning of the bowl rather than to relate it to feeding the dead.

Feeding the Dead in Hosea 9:4

The boundaries established in purity laws mark levels of separation. This separation primarily pertains to the ritual cult, but it also brings into stark relief practices that were directed toward the dead rather than Yahweh. This was the case in Deut 26:14, where actions for the dead (described simply as *מת*) are circumscribed. But the problem of separation also appears in a similar passage, Hos 9:4, where food for the dead is mentioned. In this passage, however, the dead are referred to by the term *נפש*.

They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to Yahweh, and their sacrifices shall not please him. Theirs is like the bread of mourning, all who eat of it make themselves impure because their bread is for their defunct soul—it shall not come to the house of Yahweh.

Beginning with the reference to the “bread of mourning” (*לחם אונים*) in verse 4a, certain key terms compare with the vow in Deut 26:14.⁹¹ Eating (*אכל*) is associated with mourning (*אנה*), and this association is further related to impurity. The three general areas covered by these texts (mourning rites, corpse impurity, and interaction with the dead) reflect the broad range of actions involved in care.⁹² As such, they bear witness to the fact that in the cultural background of this biblical passage it was commonplace to provide food for the dead. Whereas the food in Deut 26:14 is “for the dead” (*למת*), in Hos 9:4 the defiling food is “for their defunct soul” (*לנפשם*). Once again, as in the texts from Leviticus (19:26; 21:1) and Numbers (9:6–7; 19:11), the preposition *ל* directs the actions of the living on behalf of the dead.⁹³ The additional details in Deut 26:14 and Hos 9:4 indicate that the purposeful actions signaled by this preposition (*ל*) included feeding the dead.

91. Despite the Masoretic accents, the translation here takes the affixed *כ* as marking a separate clause that describes the object of defilement. The syntax of the clause is built around the *כ* and *לחם*, emphasizing the comparison “*in every respect* like . . . for them.” For a full treatment, see Suriano, “Breaking Bread,” 396 n. 52, following A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 343–44 and GKC § 118x.

92. On the threefold statement, see D. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 2002), 641.

93. While I would argue strongly for the interpretation “for the dead,” other readings such as “with the dead” (Bloch-Smith, “Cult,” 220) and “on account of the dead” (Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead*, 191) are instructive because the food could have been part of rituals of commensality, where the living and the dead ate together. It is unlikely that people would have assembled inside a bench tomb, given the average size, but any form of contact with a dead

Feeding the Dead at Zincirli (Sam'al)

The biblical texts examined here lack details such as the type of food, the protocols involved in providing food, or the regularity of the provisions. These details can be found in comparable examples of feeding the dead from neighboring cultures. Along with remembering the names of the dead, feeding the dead was an important component in the Iron Age cultures of the Levant.⁹⁴ In fact, at Zincirli the two were inextricably bound. In the Hadad stele (KAI 214), Panamuwa I addresses future generations who will inherit his throne and thus take custody of the stele dedicated to Hadad. The stipulations he gives are clear regarding how he is to be cared for in death.

KAI 214:17–18a

Thus, he will say: “May the defunct soul of Panamuwa eat with you [Hadad] and may the defunct soul of Panamuwa drink with you [Hadad].” Continually he will remember the defunct soul of Panamuwa with ^{18a} [Ha]dad.

The ritual actions involve invoking the name of the dead king and feeding him. That these actions associate Panamuwa with the god Hadad should not be taken as an indication that the dead king was deified. Rather, the defunct king eats and drinks with the storm god because his postmortem veneration is tied to the rituals surrounding the cultic object that he had dedicated. Panamuwa's piety toward Hadad is to be rewarded by the continued remembrance of his own name. This remembrance is enacted with each offering of food and drink given to both the dead king and his deity.⁹⁵

The inscription does not describe Panamuwa's soul (*nbs*) as a Mesopotamian-like ghost (the *eṭemmu*) that is to be feared and hence appeased through offerings. The curses that warn against neglecting Hadad's stele—and Panamuwa's veneration—are in fact rather passive. This passivity is seen for instance in lines 21–24, which include a warning that restates, in negative form, the terms

body would have rendered the living impure. This impurity was transferable and would have affected food by means of touch. So simply gathering outside of a tomb or alongside a dead body about to be buried would have been enough, according to the biblical sources.

94. J. C. Greenfield, “Un rite religieux araméen et ses parallèles,” *Revue Biblique* 80 (1973): 50–51 and S. Sanders, “Naming the Dead: Funerary Writing and Historical Change in the Iron Age Levant,” *Maarav* 19 (2012): 16–17.

95. As I have noted elsewhere, this is another example of the routinization of ritual; see Suriano, “Breaking Bread,” following J. Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual,” *History of Religions* 20 (1980): 112–27.

of line 17 (see lines 21–22). Instead of being cursed by a god, the violator will suffer in death the same neglect that the stele warns against: lack of care and feeding. This theme is emphasized in the curses of lines 22–24 and highlighted at the end of line 23,⁹⁶ where it is stated that their eating will be “disturbed” (*rgz*). The allusion refers to the disruption of postmortem feeding for anyone who neglects to feed Panamuwa’s *nbš*. The specific verb (*rgz*) appears in other texts that deal with the dead, and in those contexts it refers to disturbing the dead. For example, in the sarcophagus inscription of Tabnit (KAI 13:6), the Phoenician *yiphil* form of the root is used to forbid tampering with the king’s bones.⁹⁷ In the necromancy account in 1 Sam 28:15 the *hiphil* form of $\sqrt{\text{rgz}}$ is used to describe the negative disposition of the dead (Samuel) when he asks: “Why have you disturbed me?” In Isa 14:9, the verb (*qal*) describes the state of Sheol upon the arrival of the dead king of Babylon (the root appears also in Isa 14:3 and 16).⁹⁸ The root *rgz* (rgz) reflects the precarious nature of the dead, given that their status is dependent upon the living.

Like the נִפְשׁ in Leviticus, Numbers, and Hos 9:4, the defunct soul in the Aramaic inscriptions is a physical object. Unlike the defunct soul in the biblical texts, the Aramaic *nbš/npš* is not a dead body but an object made of stone. For example, in the Panamuwa Inscription (KAI 215:18) the soul of Panamuwa II seems to have been associated with a monument (*mšky*) that Tiglath-pileser III set up for the king of Sam’al in a distant land. The Assyrian ruler’s actions were out of loyalty to his vassal, who died fighting alongside him. But a fragmentary part (lines 17–18) suggests that the statue provided a venue for Panamuwa’s soul to eat and drink, despite his burial far from his homeland.⁹⁹ The dedicatory statue (*nšb*) set up in Zincirli for Panamuwa by his son Bar-rakib, which describes the distant monument (*mšky*), addresses this basic problem. This situation is not

96. Although the epigraphy in this particular line is difficult, the reading *brgz* is strongly supported; see J. Tropper, *Die Inschriften von Zincirli* (Münster: UGARIT-Verlag, 1993), 84. Tropper follows KAI in translating the term as “Zorn,” which is followed by “Hadad Inscription,” trans. K. Lawson Younger (COS 2:36). Conversely, the translation “disturbed” offered here refers to the disrupted status of feeding the dead. Again, we see the use of the circumstantial particle in describing a condition affected by death—here, the disruption of one’s postmortem veneration.

97. First observed by J. G. Greenfield, “Scripture and Inscription: The Literary and Rhetorical Element in Some Early Phoenician Inscriptions,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. H. Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 258–59.

98. C. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 208.

99. The different reconstructions have the same results; see “The Panamuwa Inscription,” trans. K. Lawson Younger (COS 2.37 n. 34).

unlike that of the Hadad stele, where the soul of Panamuwa I is evoked as part of the rituals surrounding a cultic statue ostensibly dedicated to a god.

The context for feeding the dead in these inscriptions was one of ritual performance. The rituals reified the personhood of the ritually centered object. This is described in some detail in the Katumuwa stele, an eighth century BCE Aramaic inscription from Zincirli.¹⁰⁰ The stele is an inscribed statue that bears the name and image of a royal official who dedicated the object during his lifetime, and it was the central component in the ritual veneration of Katumuwa for over a century, long after he died. As such, the stele represents the veneration of the dead rather than funerary rituals. It was located in a domestic setting and unrelated to Katumuwa's mortal remains, which were presumably buried outside the city walls of Sam'al.

Like the Hadad and Panamuwa inscriptions (KAI 214–15), the Katumuwa stele offers a cogent parallel for the feeding of the dead referenced in biblical literature (see fig. 19). But this Aramaic inscription sheds further light on two interrelated aspects. The first is the ritual setting for feeding the dead, or defunct soul. The second is the contextualization of the soul within this setting of ritual feeding. These and other issues can be addressed through analysis of the inscription.¹⁰¹

Katumuwa Stele

- 1). I am Katumuwa, servant of Panamuwa, who acquired for myself (this) stele in
- 2). my lifetime, and placed it in my eternal chamber. Now the festal offering
- 3). of this chamber: a bull for Hadad *harpatalli* and a ram for Nik-
- 4). arawas of the hunters and a ram for Shamash, and a ram for Hadad of the vineyards,
- 5). and a ram for Kubaba, and a ram for my defunct soul (*nbš*) that is in this stele.

100. Pardee, "New Aramaic Inscription," 51–71 and J. D. Schloen and A. S. Fink, "New Excavations at Zincirli Höyük in Turkey (Ancient Sam'al) and the Discovery of an Inscribed Mortuary Stele," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 356 (2009): 1–13. See also Sanders, "Appetites," 85–105 and the essays in V. R. Herrmann and J. D. Schloen, eds., *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East*, Oriental Institute Museum Publications 37 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014).

101. In addition to the editio princeps, see now "The KTMW Inscription," trans. D. Pardee (COS 4.23:95–96) and Pardee, "The Katumuwa Inscription," in Herrmann and Schloen, *In Remembrance of Me*, 45–48. See also the translations in Sanders, "Appetites," 86–87; H. Niehr, "Religion in den Königreichen der Aramäer Syriens," in *Religionen in der Umwelt des Alten Testaments II: Phönizier, Punier, Aramäer*, Studienbücher Theologie 4.2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 282–83; and the extensive treatment in Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 128–50.



FIG. 19 The Katumuwa stele. Drawing by Karen Reczuch (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 19, fig. 4). Courtesy of the Neubauer Expedition to Zincirli and the American Schools of Oriental Research.

- 6). Thus, whomever of my sons or
- 7). whomever of anyone [else's] sons who will come into possession of
- 8). this chamber, thus he must take from
- 9). the best of this vineyard [and] a sheep,¹⁰²
- 10). regularly, and he should slaughter
- 11). for my defunct soul (*nbš*)
- 12). and offer
- 13). to me a thigh cut.

Katumuwa's use of *nbš* in reference to himself and his specifications for feeding his *nbš* both provide valuable insight. Twice Katumuwa refers to his *nbš* (lines 5 and 11), in both instances it requires food, and in both it is qualified by a pronominal suffix ("my soul"). In the first occurrence, Katumuwa's soul is localized within the stele itself: "for my soul that is in this stele" (*lnbšy.zy.bnšb.zn*). In this sense the stele compares with the other Aramaic inscriptions discussed in this chapter that describe, or infer, a soul belonging to a statue or other stone object. But the Katumuwa stele is unique in how it specifically contextualizes the *nbš*. The stele's text can be divided into two parts (lines 1–5 and 6–13): the first part establishes the spatial setting within which the soul exists, and the second part establishes the regularity of the soul's care.

The spatial dynamics of the initial section involve both the "stele" (*nšb*) and the specialized "chamber" (*syd*),¹⁰³ within which the stele is set. The latter term, *syd*, is understood to be the small room (3.75 x 3.0 meters; see fig. 20) in which the stele was discovered.¹⁰⁴ Seth Sanders has pointed out that the initial section of the Katumuwa stele can be compared with Old South Arabian

102. Previously I had followed the reading "(presentation?)-offering year by year" by Pardee, "New Aramaic Inscription," 65, although I also noted as a possibility the translation of *š'* as "sheep" suggested by Niehr, "Religion," 283. The new translation of a Sam'al inscription from Ördekburnu supports Niehr's reading; see A. Lemaire and B. Sass, "The Mortuary Stele with Sam'alian Inscription from Ördekburnu near Zincirli," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 369 (2013): 122–24. I have supplied the conjunctive, since it would seem that the produce *and* the lamb would constitute the regular offering.

103. Sanders, "Appetites," 88–89 compared the *syd* with the Qatabanian term *ms'wd* for a special type of funerary chamber, following the lexical observations of G. Mazzini, "On the Problematic Term *syr/d* in the New Old Aramaic Inscription from Zincirli," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 41 (2009 [2010]): 505–8. See, similarly, E. Masson, "La stèle mortuaire de Kuttamuwa (Zincirli): Comment l'appréhender," *Semitica et Classica* 3/3 (2010): 52, but see Gregorio del Olmo Lete, "KTMW and His Funerary 'Chapel,'" *Aula Orientalis* 29 (2011): 308–10 and Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 130.

104. For the precise location of the room, see the discussion of the stele's context in E. Struble and V. Herrmann, "An Eternal Feast at Sam'al: The New Iron Age Mortuary

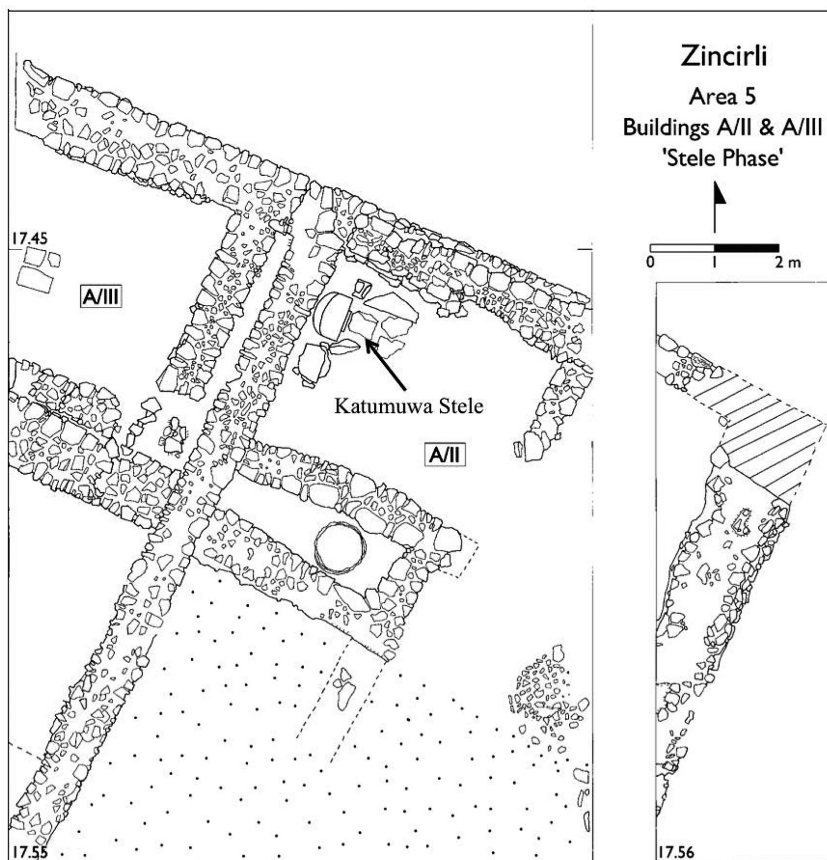


FIG. 20 Building II of Complex A at Zincirli (Sam'al) (Struble and Herrmann 2009: 34, fig. 9). Courtesy of the Neubauer Expedition to Zincirli and the American Schools of Oriental Research.

funerary inscriptions, where the terms *ms'wd* and *nfs'* mark the exterior and interior space of the dedicated complex, respectively. He also found that, in these inscriptions, the complex was established through the “decree” ($\sqrt{hgg} > hgg$) of a god, which is a significant comparison to *hgg* in line 2 of the Katumuwa stele. Here, a dedication feast for the chamber—*whggst syd*, “and

Stele from Zincirli in Context,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 356 (2009): 33–36. See also V. R. Herrmann, “The Katumuwa Stele in Archaeological Context,” in Herrmann and Schloen, *In Remembrance of Me*, 49–56 and Herrmann, “The KTMW Stele from Zincirli: Syro-Hittite Mortuary Cult and Urban Social Networks,” in *Redefining the Sacred: Religious Architecture and Text in the Near East and Egypt 1000 BC–AD 300*, ed. E. Frood and R. Raja, Contextualising the Sacred 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 153–81.

the festal offering of the chamber" (lines 2–3a)—lists food given to a series of deities (lines 3b–5)¹⁰⁵ and ends with a reference to Katumuwa's soul within the stele.

In Old South Arabian funerary inscriptions the *nfs'* stands for the constructed interior of a larger complex, while in the Katumuwa inscription it is an entity associated with the stele. Yet in each case, the use of the Semitic term (*nfs'/nbš*) relates to the identification of the dead. They differ only in their contextualization. In the Katumuwa stele, the establishment of the ritual space in the first five lines reveals the discursive function of *nbš*. The beginning of the inscription identifies Katumuwa as the person who acquired the monument and placed it within its specified location. This initial dedication in lines 1–2a, which is spatial, is followed by a ritual dedication in lines 2b–5. Indeed, symmetry is built around the *nšb* 'stele' in this first section (lines 1–5), which begins with reference to the stele inside the eternal chamber (lines 1–2a) and ends with the soul inside the stele (line 5). This object, the stele, bears Katumuwa's name and image and, as such, functions as the centerpiece of his ritual remembrance. The second section of the inscription is more general. It is removed from the specific details of the first, and the reference to the stele is elided in the single mention of Katumuwa's soul. This mention is written with the circumstantial particle attached to the noun: *b-nbš* (line 11). In the Katumuwa stele, this particle is typically translated with a proximal sense,¹⁰⁶ but its usage is comparable to the other occurrences of the circumstantial particle (–ב) seen in Hadad stele (KAI 214:23); Num 19:13a, 16; and most notably Deut 26:14.¹⁰⁷ In each of these cases, the particle follows the predicate and begins a statement of propriety.¹⁰⁸

Katumuwa's inscription addresses the propriety of the ritual in lines 6–13, and its discussion of feeding distinguishes the practice at Zincirli from the feeding of the dead that occurred inside the tomb in Judah. In this second

105. Sanders, "Appetites," 89–90. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 130 first suggested the translation of *hgg*t as a noun in construct with *syd*, comparing it with Mishnaic Hebrew חגיגה 'festal offering of . . .'. This reading is preferable to the one I had followed earlier, which took the form to be a D-stem verb. It also reinforces the comparison Sanders made with *hg* in the Old South Arabian parallels. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 140 was hesitant to equate *nsyd* in line 8 with *syd* in lines 2–3, arguing that the variance in spelling may indicate a different meaning. Toward this end, he suggested that *nsyd* might signify the complex in its entirety, inclusive of the vineyard. This possibility would offer further support for Sanders's analogy.

106. Pardee, "New Aramaic Inscription," 66; see also Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 147.

107. Suriano, "Breaking Bread," 399 n. 67.

108. In GKC § 119i, the particle on בטה is referred to as the *beth essentiae*.

section of the inscription (lines 6–13), future generations are admonished to continually venerate Katumuwa's name. The regular feeding (*ywmn.lywmn*) in line 10,¹⁰⁹ which is required of all who possess the surrounding compound, compares with the description of this space as an "eternal chamber" (*syd. 'lm*) in line 2.¹¹⁰ The purpose of the Katumuwa stele is to create a ritual routine,¹¹¹ which not only defines the space in which the stele sits but also establishes Katumuwa's selfhood in a way that will outlive his time on earth. Herein lies a distinction with the practices of feeding the dead alluded to in Deut 26:14 and Hos 9:4. The passage in Deuteronomy offers a host of terms that are interrelated: mourning, (corpse) impurity, and the dead. The first two, mourning customs and corpse contamination, relate to situational practices that are predicated by the event of death. Moreover, the archaeological evidence suggests that feeding the dead in Judah occurred inside the tomb and was not an ongoing phenomenon. In other words, in Zincirli the practice of feeding the dead was a regular ritual that was conducted around a stone object representing the dead (ancestor veneration), while in Judah it was an irregular rite that was focused on the corpse (funerary rituals).

Feeding the Dead in Job 21:25

The cultural practice of leaving food in the tomb lies behind an ambiguous passage found in the book of Job. The text, Job 21:25, is a discussion of fate that compares the rich and the poor. Here Job associates eating with the dead, referred to as נפש. The point of the poetic language is not to describe care for the dead, but its rhetoric draws from this aspect of mortuary culture in order to juxtapose the respective conditions of the dead in Job 21:23–26.

The one dies self-affirmed, fully at ease and in his quietude;²⁴⁾ his vats filled with milk and the marrow of his bones drink.²⁵⁾ The other dies with a bitter soul and does not eat of goodness.²⁶⁾ Together, upon the dust they will lie down, and the worm covers them (both).

109. Pardee, "New Aramaic Inscription," 65–66 and Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 146.

110. Niehr, "Religion," 283 n. 112 discusses the significance of *'lm* as a descriptor of this chamber. Note the three occurrences of *syd*, first in construct as "my eternal chamber" (*syd. 'lm*), then in the second position in "the festal offering of my chamber" (*hggst syd*), and then finally as *nsyd*. It is unclear why the last form is written with *n*.

111. Smith, "Bare Facts," 113.

The image comes in Job's response to the idea that the wicked will be judged accordingly in death. His answer is that everyone goes to the grave alike, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, wicked or righteous.¹¹² That is, death has a leveling effect that is unrelated to how one is buried or judged by God.¹¹³ Job's point in verse 26 is enforced through images commonly associated with the tomb: "dust" (עפר), "lie down" (שכב), and "worm" (רמה). But Job begins his description of the dead by depicting the wicked as resting safely (vv. 23–24). The root עצם is used twice, first as "self" (v. 23a) and then in its plain sense of "bones" (v. 24b). In the second instance, the positive condition of the dead is expressed through the image of bones drinking milk.¹¹⁴ The contrast in the next verse (Job 21:25) is short and simple: the soul of the poor person is bitter in death. In this particular image, the negative condition of the soul is expressed through the dead person's inability to eat well.

The term נפש in this passage clearly stands for a dead person, but the parallelism is antithetical. Rather than an idealized image of caring for the dead (alluded to in vv. 23–24), the person or self in verse 25 is poorly provided for in death. The point of the passage (21:21–26 in general and the parallelism of vv. 23–25 in particular) is to challenge the ideals that underscore rituals of death and remembrance. The righteous sufferer's words are thus similar to Qoheleth's dismissal of functional immortality (e.g., Eccl 2:14–16), but in Job the image is offered as a counterpoint to the arguments of his friends.¹¹⁵

112. N. C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985).

113. In this speech, Job responds to specific points made earlier in the book regarding the death of the wicked versus the death of the righteous; see D. Mathewson, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 450 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 114–24.

114. The translation above takes "marrow of his bones" as the subject of the final verb in 21:24, יִשְׁקָה 'drink'. The hapax legomenon עֵטִין, which is translated "vats" in light of Mishnaic Hebrew, presents problems for interpretation. In later Hebrew, the term can mean dripping olive oil or oil containers, but it can also serve as a metaphor for male genitalia. Both meanings would appear to be at play in the poetry of this passage. The previous verse refers to the progeny left behind by the deceased, and the larger passage (Job 21:21–34) discusses the legacy of the dead, hence children. But 21:24a also involves the collection of liquid, specifically milk (which also carries symbolic force in relation to children), and implies a vessel that becomes filled with the milk. See the discussion and different translations in L. L. Grabbe, *Comparative Philology and the Text of Job: A Study in Methodology*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 34 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977) and Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 223 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 77–78.

115. Mathewson, *Death and Survival*, 120 and C. A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161–66. Newsom, *Book of Job*,

The arguments against the idea of functional immortality, here in Job and in Qoheleth, touch upon other issues as well. The righteous sufferer does not deny the existence of caring for the dead or question its propriety; he merely wonders whether it matters since everyone ends up the same regardless of their burial.

The arguments that Job contends with, the arguments made by his friends, question whether he has done something wrong and thus invited his ill fortune. But this is only one facet in the larger complex of ideas associated with death. What was the purpose of functional immortality, and how did it connect with mortuary practices and related rituals? If the term נַפֵּשׁ in a certain biblical text is assigned to a dead body—a rotting corpse that is ritually impure—how can we compare it to the *nbš* in the inscriptions from Zincirli, where it is enshrined in stone artifacts? The biblical concept of selfhood, bound up in the word נַפֵּשׁ, is seemingly ephemeral. It is a status that was dependent upon the temporary condition of the body, first during the funeral and then inside the tomb. Katumuwa's *nbš* on the other hand was intended to be permanent and enduring, and it was accessible inside a household cult. But to acknowledge this problem is not to affirm a biblical belief in postmortem annihilation, or even Pedersen's monism. It is to assert instead the relational nature of death in the embodiment of the soul. In the different examples, the ritual actions of the living assign a physical presence to the soul/self, a presence marked by either a corpse or a stele.

Dedications for the Dead

The discursive element that runs through the texts reviewed above is undeniable. The texts describe or allude to cultural action performed by the living for the dead regardless of whether the main concern was the proscription of customs for sake of purity, as in the pentateuchal texts, or whether the intention was the veneration of the dead in monumental form, as in the Aramaic inscriptions. In this sense, death is relational, but it is also transitional. The dialectical relationship between the living and the dead is marked by the preposition *ל*. This point might seem minor, yet when it is examined within the wider tradition of Northwest Semitic dedicatory formulae, it reveals what was at stake in the care for the dead.

163–64 compares Job here with Qoheleth, while E. Murphy, “Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature,” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 113 compares Job 21:23–25 with Ben Sira.

The relational aspect of death that is reflected in mortuary practices is evident in the opening words of the Ahirom sarcophagus (KAI 1). This inscription is important for two reasons: because of its literary form, beginning in the first line, and because of the fact that it is an inscribed funerary object (a sarcophagus).¹¹⁶

KAI 1

Sarcophagus that Ittoba'al, son of Ahirom, the king of Byblos, made for Ahirom, his father, when he placed him in the eternal place.²¹ Now if a king among kings or a governor among governors or the commander of an army should rise up against Byblos and uncover this sarcophagus, may the scepter of his rule be uprooted, may the throne of his kingship be overturned, and may peace depart from Byblos! And, as for him, may his inscription be effaced with the double edge of a chisel.

The formulaic beginning of the inscription identifies the object—the sarcophagus—as well as the person for whom it is dedicated.¹¹⁷ Although this formula usually appears in inscriptions where an object is dedicated to a god, the tenth century BCE Ahirom sarcophagus (KAI 1) marks an early example of its use on behalf of the dead. In fact the application of the votive/dedicatory formula continues throughout the first millennium BCE and even into late antiquity. The form is important to note here because of the implications raised by its opening syntax. This syntax fronts the dedicated object in the opening line and then marks the benefactor in a relative clause before listing the beneficiary in a prepositional clause. What this syntax reveals is a dialectical relationship between the living and the dead. The beneficiary of this dedication is not a deity but a dead person (Ahirom). The act of dedication that is commemorated here, by Ittoba'al, is performed for the dead. The formula marks this relationship through the *l-* preposition. A comparison of the dedicatory syntax in the Ahirom sarcophagus (KAI 1:1) and the Panamuwa inscription from Zincirli (KAI 215:1) reveals a key link in the social construction of the dead.

KAI 1	"Sarcophagus that Ittoba'al . . . made <i>for</i> Ahirom, his father"
KAI 215	"This statue Bar-rakib set up <i>for</i> his father, for Panamuwa"

116. The translation of the last line follows "The Sarcophagus of 'Ahirom, King of Byblos," trans. P. K. McCarter (COS 2.55).

117. J. Obermann, "Votive Inscriptions from Ras Shamra," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 61 (1948): 34–36 drew from five Phoenician and Ugaritic examples, which are listed

Certainly there are differences between these two examples, aside from slight syntactical variance.¹¹⁸ The first dedicates a place of burial, the sarcophagus, whereas the second memorializes a king who died abroad and hence is unrelated to burial. But both display an important form of dedicating the dead, and in their dedicatory syntax, they show how the relational links between the living and the dead were constructed.

In both the Ahirom sarcophagus and the Panamuwa inscription, the thing dedicated for the dead person is the object of the text, be it a coffin or a stele. But the object is produced through the actions of the living, and this focus reveals why the social dimension of the dead was so important. The veneration of the dead was socially beneficial for the living. Take, for example, another Phoenician text, the Arkita inscription (*CIS* 1, 58), which comes from Cyprus and dates to the Persian period.

CIS 1, 58

- 1). The commemorative pillar among the living
- 2). that Ab[d-osir] set up
- 3). for [his] father
- 4). for Arkita.

The opening syntax of this inscription, and others such as the Ahirom sarcophagus and the Panamuwa inscription, reveals a paradox. Although the inscription is ostensibly dedicated to the dead, it is rhetorically focused on the living. The object-subject pattern emphasizes the action: here the dedication of a commemorative pillar (*mšbt*). The subject is not the dead, although the inscription effectively remembers his name. The subject of the relative clause in the Arkita inscription is the son, Abd-osir, who sets up a monument *for* his dead father. In all of these inscriptions, the dead person (beneficiary) is marked by an *l*-preposition. Grammatically speaking, the dead person is the indirect object of the action described in the formulaic syntax.

The beneficiary marked by the preposition in this particular formulary sheds light on the perspectives of biblical texts that describe corpse impurity and feeding the dead (Lev 19:28; 21:1; Num 19:11; Deut 26:14; and Hos 9:4). It forces us to reconsider the ramifications of allowing priests to become impure

here along with the respective (votive) objects; *KAI* 1 (*ʾm* = coffin), *KAI* 4 (*bt* = house [temple]), *KAI* 6 (*mš* = statue), *KTU* 6.13 (*skn* = stele), and *KTU* 6.14 (*pgr* = offering?).

118. In the Panamuwa inscription, the fronted object is followed by a demonstrative particle: *nšb zn šm brrk b lʾbh lpmmw*. This is not unusual and occurs in later Nabatean Aramaic inscriptions.

for dead family members. And it requires us to evaluate the frameworks that allowed provisions made *for* the dead, in accordance with biblical purview. The perspective in all of these situations, in both scripture and inscription, is one of inclusion. It encompasses the concerns of both the living and the dead. It recognizes the dependence of the dead upon the living, but it also stresses the importance of the dead for the living. The Phoenician examples also mark transition, as son follows father. The formal syntax of these inscriptions reveals the logic of ancestorhood. The commemoration of the father meant the continuity of his family through his son.

The continuity expressed in the Arkita inscription was undoubtedly a public claim and, as such, it marked inheritance and the transfer of wealth. Herein lies a critical point for understanding the dead in the ancient Levant. On the one side is the privilege of the dead: the continuity of their memory through proper burial, their care and feeding in death. These constitute the foundations of functional immortality. On the other side is the privilege of the living: the ability to claim power and resources through the placement of the dead. In archaeology, this is explained through the Saxe-Goldstein hypothesis. But this cultural process, inheritance through patrilineal descent, can also be recognized in the syntax of these inscriptions.

Conclusion

Death in the Hebrew Bible was relational. A person's postmortem existence was dependent upon the care provided to the person by the living. The things done by the living for the dead—things like feeding and remembering their names—sustained their postmortem existence. The Hebrew Bible does not deny these practices, but it does restrict them, effectively creating boundaries around the dead body. These restrictions refer to the body as a נֶפֶשׁ—a corpse—an object that was at once an identifiable entity and a defiling object. In the situations implied in passages such as Lev 21:1–4, the נֶפֶשׁ is a dead family member who requires proper burial, mourning, and other forms of care. The נֶפֶשׁ is a dead body that is still identified by name. Here we can see how the nuance of the term in describing the dead intersects with its predominant meaning as “self” in the Hebrew Bible. The term נֶפֶשׁ can thus be understood in a general sense as the distinctiveness of individual life, as well as a totalizing essence that orders and asserts personality.¹¹⁹ Yet despite the potency

119. Seebass, “נֶפֶשׁ; *Nepeš*,” 506, 510. See similarly Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:137–39. Barr, *Garden*, 42–43 speaks of a “controlling centre which accompanies, expresses and directs the existence of that totality, and one which, especially, provides the life to the whole.”

of the term, it should not be read as a force that is active and powerful.¹²⁰ If anything, its meaning is passively conveyed. The soul is contextualized and, as such, is subject to larger cultural forces. The power of the נפש was in its ability to express the identifying principles of the individual even in death. This was done through a constellation of practices that included mourning, as well as remembering, burying, and feeding the departed souls.

It would seem that נפש, as soul, is best understood as an organizing principle. It is a principle of being that could be enacted within certain contexts, embodied through different means, and empowering in its ability to affirm identity. Often the word bears a meaning of “self” that is almost lost in its own existential function in language. For instance, it can be grammaticalized as a reflexive pronoun, as in נפשי, “myself/my soul” in Ps 88:15. But in the care for the dead, the soul is embodied through ritual, and this embodiment can take different forms depending on its cultural context. In Leviticus and Numbers, the context implies burial and mourning, and the contextualized נפש is the dead body. In the Aramaic sources, the defunct soul is inscribed in stone. Although the details differ, in both examples the operative ideal was one of functional immortality. This ideal was embodied either in a stone monument or in the venerated dead. The treatment of the dead body—care for the dead—formed the basis of functional immortality. The נפש was not immortal in the Western sense of this concept. There was no dialectic of body and soul, nor was there any concept of the soul’s transmigration. Instead, the defunct soul in the Hebrew Bible was sustained through the continuity of family, who provided care and feeding for their dead.

The study of the embodied dead in this chapter touches upon two important themes: the relational and the transitional aspects of death. Death is relational, and the ritual response to it allowed questions of identity to be resolved by the living for the dead. This response also addressed the necessary transitions caused by death for both the dead and the living. The study of the things the living did *for* the dead offers a context for examining the self in death. This entity, the soul of the dead, emerges from a discourse with the dead. The soul of the dead is inferred in biblical regulations regarding corpse impurity and food for the dead, and it is specifically named in dedications for the deceased. The host of activities performed by the living, here referred to as care *for* the dead, embodied this נפש in death. In this manner, the afterlife ideals of continuity and memory were inscribed upon ritual bodies.

120. So, e.g., Seebass, “נפש; *Nepeš*,” 510, who offers an emotive explanation: “it refers to psychic power, abounding personality, energy that exorcises all gloominess.”

The Narrative of Bones

IF DEAD BODIES have biographies that can be displayed in their interment, as archaeologists have insisted, what do these biographies (or narratives) look like in the literary sources? The fates of Joseph and Jezebel in the Hebrew Bible provide two examples of how biography can be tied to stories of bones. The treatment of their bodies—the care provided or withheld—plays an important role in the narratives of both. In each case a specific word, פָּקַד ‘care,’ is used to describe the care for the dead. The narratives of their bones reveals how the afterlife was embodied, as well as how the treatment of the dead related to divine concepts of promise or punishment. The care given to Joseph’s bones contrasts with the neglect and destruction of Jezebel’s, and this contrast yields insight into how the biblical writers viewed death and the postmortem. Not only do the narratives of their fates exemplify both sides of the good death/bad death dichotomy but also they show how the treatment of the dead could embody messages of hope or symbolize discontinuity and destruction. Ultimately, these stories suggest new ways of considering death, the afterlife, and the role of ancestors in the Hebrew Bible.

Traditions of Joseph and His Bones

In his book *Understanding Genesis*, Nahum Sarna commented on the mummification of Joseph in Egypt (Gen 50:26): “It is well-known that mummification, and all its elaborate ritual, played an important role in the cult of the dead. It had a distinctly religious connotation and was connected with the belief in survival after death, a belief in immortality which the Egyptians were incapable of dissociating from the notion of the physical survival of the body.”¹ Egyptian mortuary practices, however, were about the reembodiment of the

1. N. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 226.

dead through mummification. Rather than the physical survival of the body, the primary intention of this practice was to embody the dead in the form of Osiris, the god who ruled the underworld.² In fact, the cultural distinction implied in this quote raises several questions. Apart from their acute cultural particularities, how did Israelite concepts of immortality differ from Egyptian concepts? Were these concepts of postmortem survival dissociated from the body in ancient Israel, as distinct from Egypt? Although it is unclear whether Sarna intended to broach such questions, it is difficult to avoid them when reading the final verses in Genesis.

The death of Joseph is unique not only because of his mummification in Egypt but also because of the eventual reburial of his bones in the land of Canaan. Yet Joseph's reburial in the promised land is not with the other patriarchs in the Cave of Machpelah. Moreover, unlike Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the death idiom "gathered to his peoples" is not applied to Joseph's passing. These two aspects of Joseph's death are interrelated. The death idiom expressed lineal descent and inheritance customs that were rooted in mortuary practices.³ Joseph was not "gathered to his peoples" because he was not buried by his sons in the Cave of Machpelah.⁴ Yet Joseph was never cut off from the inheritance of the promised land, despite his death and primary burial in Egypt. The reburial of his bones eventually occurs on a plot of land purchased by Jacob in Shechem (Gen 33:19), representing the inheritance of Ephraim and Manasseh, "the sons of Joseph" (Josh 24:32). Thus, the story of his burial underlies the inheritance of the land, albeit in a manner different from the other patriarchs.

The physical survival of Joseph's body plays an underappreciated role in the Old Testament's overarching narrative.⁵ A key to understanding the significance of his bones and of their reburial is the repeated use of the term פקד in his deathbed account. This particular root in Semitic languages can be used to describe care for the dead. The most notable example is the Akkadian

2. J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 70–75.

3. M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 46–49.

4. Conversely, as N. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 351 notes, Joseph is not taken directly to the land to be buried; instead his body is to wait until the exodus. Furthermore, Joseph stipulates only that his bones be relocated to the land, not specifically where his corpse is to be buried.

5. See, however, the excellent study in K. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. J. Nogalski (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

word *pāqīdu*,⁶ and its meaning “caring for, attending to, the dead.” This specific mortuary sense is evident in a few rare occurrences in Hebrew (see 2 Kgs 9:34 and Sir 49:15). The latter example is from Ben Sira’s praise of Joseph, which references the oath in Genesis. The meaning of פָּקַד in Gen 50:24–25 relates to the Israelite deity’s actions toward Joseph’s brothers, not his bones. In fact, the Hebrew word takes on a powerful role in describing the relationship between the Israelites and their deity, and this role is reflected in Ben Sira’s intertextual play on words. The covenantal relationships that this word connects to in the Hebrew Bible are rooted in the past and defined through ancestral traditions. Therefore, it is important to look closely at √פָּקַד in order to understand how a particular afterlife ideal was inscribed upon the bones of Joseph.

The Death of Joseph

And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am dying, but God will surely care (פָּקַד יִפְקֹד) for you and bring you up from this land to the land that was sworn to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”²⁵ And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying: “Surely God will care (פָּקַד יִפְקֹד) for you if you take up my bones from here.”

—Gen 50:24–25

Joseph’s deathbed account shows the relational importance of care for the dead because it establishes how the dead were cared for, who cared for the dead, and why they did so. Joseph’s final words address his brothers rather than his sons, although the sons and grandchildren appear in the previous verse (Gen 50:23). But the oath that was sworn does not involve the individual patrimony of the house of Joseph; instead, it relates to the promises given to all of the children of Israel. This is an important point to consider because of the type of inheritance at work in this account. The promise of land is conditioned in familiar terms of lineal descent, and proper burial is associated with inheritance. But in this case, patrimony does not simply pass from parent to child. The implications here are much wider. Ultimately, Joseph’s reburial symbolizes the transfer of divine promises from an ancestor to his people. The *Wiederaufnahme* of פָּקַד יִפְקֹד (vv. 24bα // 25bα) highlights this point, as the poetic language of the oath connects the repatriation of Joseph’s bones with the inheritance of the land.

The verbal root פָּקַד provides insight into the relational aspects of death that defined both the living and the dead. The semantic range of this root

6. See CAD P, *pāqīdu*, 137–38.

is broad and at times enigmatic. The connotations of $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ can cover a host of activities that include counting, punishing, caring for, and attending to (among other meanings).⁷ When we consider the semantic range of this root, it is important to acknowledge its mnemonic function. Accounting for something involves remembering on one level, revisiting the terms of an agreement engages memory on another. Syntactically, the verbal forms of this root often have a subject acting in a role of authority and typically involve a direct object.⁸ According to one study, the meaning of the root is “to assign a person or a thing to what the subject believes is its proper or appropriate status or position in an organizational order.”⁹ The act of setting something in its proper place is one of protocol, and the various forms of $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ involve maintaining this protocol. Used in a context of death, this verbal root defines not only how the living related to the dead but also how the dead functioned within wider systems of thought. The history of a people’s relationship with their gods was often constructed around ancestral narratives. The function of $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ was to associate this general idea with particular examples, specifically regarding covenantal agreements. An excellent example is Exod 34:7, which will be discussed below in comparison with a Hebrew tomb inscription. In Exod 34:7, the *qal* participle פקד expresses Yahweh’s relationship with Israel, extending into the third and fourth generations. The fulfillment of Joseph’s oath by later generations of Israelites (Exod 13:19 and Josh 24:32) reveals the outcome of this relationship. Thus a better understanding of this transgenerational sense can be gained by looking at two examples of this Semitic root, the role of the Akkadian *pāqīdu* and the parallel of Exod 34:6–7 found in Inscription B of Tomb 1 at Khirbet Beit Lei. The extrabiblical examples will provide insight into the biblical references to Joseph’s bones that follow his burial.

The Role of the pāqīdu in Mesopotamian Sources

In Akkadian texts, the *pāqīdu* was a person who provided care for the dead, rendering service through food, drink, and invocations. The responsibilities of the *pāqīdu*, who usually would have been a family member, can be reconstructed from literature that refers to the denial of proper care. For instance,

7. See conveniently G. André, “פקד: *pāqad*,” *TDOT* 12:50–63.

8. S. Creason, “*PQD* Revisited,” in *Studies in Semitic and Afroasiatic Linguistics Presented to Gene B. Gragg*, ed. C. L. Miller and C. E. Jones (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2007), 28–29.

9. Creason, “*PQD*,” 30.

in a Sumerian-Akkadian incantation series (Udug-Hul 4, 145–49), the word appears in a list of ghosts who represent the neglected dead.¹⁰

Udug-Hul 4

- ¹⁴⁵). whether you are an unburied ghost,
- ¹⁴⁶). or the ghost who does not have a care-provider (*pāqidu*),
- ¹⁴⁷). or the ghost who has no one to make a *kispu*-offering,
- ¹⁴⁸). or the ghost who has no one to pour out a water libation;
- ¹⁴⁹). Whether you are one with no one to call (his) name.

In this source, the *pāqidu* is listed among the basic requirements for proper postmortem care. In the description of the things denied the restless spirit, or “ghost,” the duties of the *pāqidu* become clear: feeding the dead and remembering their names. This list of neglected duties echoes Gilgamesh’s dialogue with his dead companion Enkidu in Tablet XII of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, specifically, when the epic hero asks his former companion and now revenant:

‘Did you see the one whose ghost has no care-provider (*pāqidu*) of funerary offerings?’

‘I saw (him). He eats the scrapings from the pot (and) crusts of bread that are thrown away in the street.’¹¹

These two texts deal with the implications of denying the dead proper care. In both, the dead person is described as an *eṭemmu*, or “ghost,” which was a type of condition in Mesopotamia for the deceased.¹² These ghosts could be considered problematic, and their removal typically involved elaborate rites of exorcism.¹³

10. My translation of the Akkadian. For a full edition, with the Sumerian, see M. Geller, *Healing Magic and Evil Demons: Canonical Udug-Hul Incantations* (Boston: de Gruyter, 2015).

11. Tablet XII: 152–53. Translation based on A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:734–35.

12. Regarding the association of the *eṭemmu* with physical care for the dead, see G. Jonker, *The Topography of Remembrance: The Dead, Tradition and Collective Memory in Mesopotamia*, Studies in the History of Religions 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 191–92.

13. J. A. Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia*, Ancient Magic and Divination 3 (Leiden: Brill and Styx, 2006); CAD E, *eṭemmu*, 397–401; and T. Abusch, “Etemmu,” in *DDD*, 309–11.

With one exception (אֵתֶמְמוּ in Isa 19:3),¹⁴ the concept of *eṭemmu* is absent from biblical sources, which lack any reference to ghosts (necromancy notwithstanding). The two examples cited here are important because they show how functional immortality could represent a careful balance between the living and the dead. In the first example, the diagnosis is intended to determine whether a troubling spirit is a dead person (*eṭemmu*) who lacks a *pāqīdu*. In the second, the absence of a care-provider (*pāqīdu*) explains the impoverishment of the dead (*eṭemmu*) in the netherworld. Both cases imply a positive or negative outcome, depending upon the level of care given for the dead.

The point of these texts is to establish the interconnection between the living and the dead. They imply care provided by one party for the other. The sense of *pāqīdu* is similar to the definition of פִּקְדוֹן. The general meaning involves the actions of an attendant subject, a person who has authority over something or someone to whom the action is directed. The meaning of the word is about the relationality of death—a living person caring for a dead person—and in this sense its meaning ties to aspects of reciprocity that correspond to the social dimensions of mortuary practices. Claiming the dead, whether through their care or through the creation of bounded cemeteries, played a critical role in the structure of ancient societies in both Mesopotamia and the Levant. While mortuary practices offer one view of this relationship, the duties of the *pāqīdu* provide another. These duties effectively constructed a concept of ancestor, a category of the dead that represented the past but also related to existing social institutions. This complex interrelationship can be observed in one last cuneiform example, the Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty, particularly its ending in lines 36–42.¹⁵

BM 80328

all persons ³⁷⁾ from the rising to the setting of the sun, ³⁸⁾ you who have no care-provider (*pāqīdu*) or one to invoke. ³⁹⁾ Come, eat this, ⁴⁰⁾ drink this, ^{41)–43)} (and) bless Ammi-saduqa, son of Ammi-ditana, king of Babylon.

14. Isaiah 19:3, which describes necromancy, is discussed in the introduction. For other commentary, see T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 133–34; Abusch, “Etemmu,” 312; and C. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 284.

15. The tablet, from the British Museum (BM 80328), was published in J. J. Finkelstein, “The Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 20 (1966): 95–118. See also Jonker, *Topography of Remembrance*, 223–25, and the edition in “Babylonian King Lists,” trans. A. Millard (COS 1.134), 462.

The rituals involved here were probably related to the *kispu*. In the first part of the tablet, the king of Babylon invokes royal ancestors from a distant past before reciting the names of more recently deceased rulers.¹⁶ The king then mentions different groups of peoples before calling upon any and every dead person who lacks proper care. The effect is extraordinary. Not only does Ammi-saduqa claim royal ancestors as his own, but he also portrays himself as the great *pāqīdu* for his people, rendering care for both the living and dead. The *kispu*, the ritual feeding of the dead, would never be denied to any subject of Ammi-saduqa. The Babylonian king's actions appealed to genealogy. Although his concept of genealogy was narrowly defined and quite exclusive, he was still able to cast this appeal broadly across the Amorite cultural landscape of the Middle Bronze Age through his reference to an important social obligation: care for the dead.

Care for the Dead at Khirbet Beit Lei

The link between divine promises and ancestors is undeniable in the Hebrew Bible. The link is effectively an ideology of death, although it is seldom explained as such. The analysis of $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ provides one way of looking at how the biblical links between past and present were forged through care for the dead. This is obvious in the Akkadian cognate *pāqīdu*, which was the title of a person who performed such duties. In the various nuances it is possible to see how memory and propriety are bundled together in a single lexeme. The past serves as a reminder for how life and society are to be organized and given structure. It is therefore easy to recognize why traditional translations rendered the different forms of $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ as “punish” or “revisit.” But the things recalled in these passages were the protocols that structured Israel's covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Israel's ancestors forged these covenants and, as such, they established various conditions for socioreligious identification. This is how the root $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ relates to the dead and why it is inherently transgenerational.

The intricate manner by which $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ relates a people, living and dead, to divine promises is evident in the parallel between Exod 34:6–7 and Inscription B from Khirbet Beit Lei's Tomb 1 (*BLei* 6). The first word of the short inscription is פקד , which should be read as either a *qal* infinitive or imperative: “Attend

16. The same strategy is at work in the Ugaritic tablet *KTU* 1.161. I have argued that this underscores the ideology of the epilogues in the biblical books of Kings; see Suriano, *Politics*, 149–51.

(to us) Yah, O gracious God! Acquit Yah, O Yahweh!" (פקד יה אל חננ נקה יה יהוה).¹⁷ In Exod 34 on the other hand the list of divine attributes famously begins with the repetition of the Tetragrammaton: יהוה יהוה. The attributes that follow in verse 6b describe the Israelite deity as a "merciful and gracious God" (אל רחום וחנון), ending in verse 7 with a reference to Yahweh's role in transgenerational punishment, specifically, in the expression "Surely he will not acquit, attending to (ונקה לא ינקה פקד) the sins of the fathers upon the sons and upon the sons of sons until the third and fourth (generation)." In *BLei* 6 (Inscription B) we find a similar description of Israel's God and the same pairing of נקה and פקד. It is therefore useful to establish a meaning that can be extended to both passages.

Inscription B (*BLei* 6) is not a prayer offered during at time of crisis, it is an assertion of Yahweh's transgenerational promises. The similar language found in Exod 34:6–7 supports the latter interpretation. The parallels suggest that Inscription B was an attempt to recall the covenantal agreements that required the national deity to act on behalf of his peoples. This finds support in another inscription from the same tomb (*BLei* 7), which simply reads: "Deliver (us) O [Ya]hweh" (הושע [י]הוה). But this deliverance is not from some unforeseen enemy. In chapter 2, Khirbet Beit Lei Tomb 1 and its inscriptions were interpreted as an attempt to reestablish Judahite control over the Shephelah. Here I suggest that the inscriptions in this tomb form a connection between a people and their deity. The two ideas are the same. The transgenerational promises that are claimed through this connection are promises of land.

The biblical parallel (Exod 34:6–7) is a reminder to the Israelites of the covenant that was made at that time and in that place. It functions as a historical credo, spoken at Sinai but addressing future generations. Indeed it is specifically transgenerational, stating clearly that the terms of the covenant (and its consequences) extend to "the third and fourth (generations)." This generational depth, the third and fourth, reflects the social structure of the joint family household in ancient Israel and indicates the extent of accountability. But the image is also transgenerational, and in this sense it represents an important component of an afterlife ideal. For example, in one of the

17. The beginning of the line is difficult to read, requiring some reconstruction (פ'קד יה "אליה). This reading follows that of A. Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976): 558–68. Although Lemaire supported this reconstruction with parallels from the Psalms, it was P. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 267 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 210–32 who first observed that the divine invocation, as well as the verb pairing, bears comparison with Exod 34:6–7.

Old Aramaic funerary stelae from Neirab (KAI 226:5), the priest Sīgabbari states: “And with my own eyes I myself saw sons of the fourth (generation) weeping for me” (*wb’yny mḥzh ’nh bny rb’ bkwny*).¹⁸ Similarly, at the end of the book of Job the protagonist sees “his sons, and the sons of his sons, four generations” (Job 42:16). The ideal is found also in Joseph’s deathbed scene, just before his brothers’ oath, when we are told: “And Joseph saw sons of the third (generation) belonging to Ephraim, as well as the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh who were born at his knees” (Gen 50:23). In all of these sources, the ability of the dead, or the dying, to see future generations is idealized. The dead and the living are interrelated. The dead hope to see future generations, while the living claim past generations.

Of course generations are not mentioned in any of the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions. The parallel between *BLei* 6 and Exod 34:6–7 only covers the divine description and the use of verbs. The generations are nevertheless implied in the invocation of *BLei* 6. Indeed, the generations are present inside the tomb. Here, care for the dead was to be performed in the name of the national deity, invoking the promises made with past generations in order to commit them to posterity. In *BLei* 6, the transgenerational implications are positive. The statement is not expressed in negative form, as in Exod 34:7, where it serves a precautionary purpose.¹⁹ The implication of *BLei* 6, with its use of this specific set of verbs, is that Yahweh’s sovereign power extends across generations and is inclusive of the dead. Its binding force allows a people, the unidentified kinship group of Khirbet Beit Lei’s Tomb 1, to align itself transgenerationally with categories of identity that are both religious and social. Their God is invoked inside the tomb. The invocation remembers the conditions that gave the kinship group their place of burial, entitling them to any rights and privileges that might be associated with it. This is the significance of *BLei* 6. Inscribed on the walls of a tomb, the evocative words demarcate the space of the dead and serve as a reminder of the transgenerational promises implied by their presence.

18. Similar words are encountered in the Neo-Babylonian funerary inscription of Adab-guppi, the mother of Nabonidus. See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 25, n. 1.

19. In the verses that follow the divine attribute in Exod 34, Moses supplicates himself before Yahweh, asking that Yahweh make Israel his inheritance (vv. 8–9). Yahweh agrees to a covenantal relationship (v. 10) and reiterates the promise of land given to the patriarchs (v. 11).

Joseph's Bones outside of Genesis

The analysis of $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ offers insight into Gen 50:24–25, as well as its reception in biblical literature. This includes not only the removal of Joseph's bones during the exodus (Exod 13:19) and their eventual reburial in Shechem (Josh 24:32) but also the references to the oath and bones in Ben Sira (the book of Sirach/Ecclesiasticus). All of these passages draw upon the fulfillment of the oath, which in turn is a realization of the promise of land given to Abraham in Gen 15. The generational promises given by Yahweh to the patriarchs, to Joseph, and to their children constitute an afterlife ideal. It is a hope for the future that transcends death.

In order to trace the literary allusions to Joseph's bones we must start with the poetic devices in Gen 50:24–25, because in these devices are motifs that become replicated in later texts. The *Wiederaufnahme* of פקד יפקד (vv. 24b α // 25b α) frames the promise of land that had been given to the patriarchs.²⁰ This phrase, the infinitive absolute followed by the third masculine singular prefix form, is quoted in Exod 13:19 when Joseph's bones are taken by Moses out of Egypt. But a similar phrase appears in Exod 3:16, when the God of Israel first reveals himself to Moses. Here, Yahweh tells Moses to “gather” (אסף) the elders of Israel, using the same root that appears in the death idiom used for the patriarchs (“gathered to peoples”). But instead, Moses is to gather the living and deliver the word of their God, who announces: “I have surely remembered” (פקדתי) the Israelites. There is no mention of Joseph or his bones in Exod 3,²¹ but the transgenerational sense conveyed in part through $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ is undeniable. It is more than just an allusion built upon a single word. The gathering here involves a people, the Israelites, who were the progeny of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's oath that Yahweh will “care for” ($\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$) his brothers finds initial fulfillment in this verse because Moses is about to lead their children—their future generations—out of Egypt and to the promised land, where they can gather Joseph's remains.

20. Joseph announces his dying state, expressed through the participle מה (v. 24). On its surface, the word refers to Joseph on his deathbed. But the nuance here is subtly revealing. Unlike his father, Jacob, Joseph does not use the euphemism for death, “gathered to peoples,” due to the unique circumstances of his burial. But the ambiguity of this participle, here standing for a dying person, reflects the state of Joseph's body in death. Upon his passing, Joseph's initial status lacked any fixed place within the ancestral promises. His corpse was mummified and interred in Egypt but awaited its final burial in another land. The particularities of this participle in relation to Sarah in Gen 23 will be discussed in the next chapter.

21. Of course, the literary sources for these passages differ as well (Gen 5:24–26; Exod 3:16; and 13:19).

The oath taken at Joseph's deathbed and the story of his bones in fact play an important role in marking stages in the Hebrew Bible's history of the Israelites. Konrad Schmid has shown that Gen 50:24–26 is redactional, forming a literary threshold between the conclusion of Genesis and the ensuing biblical narrative.²² Schmid cogently points to Ezek 37:11–22, and the valley of dry bones, as a basis for understanding Joseph's bones.²³ Ezekiel's vision addresses the concerns of an exilic community, but the issues here of social dislocation and alienation from patrimony could be addressed through stories of an ancestor's death in a foreign land such as Joseph's. This may also explain Joseph's explicitly foreign custom of primary burial: he is mummified (Gen 50:26). Ultimately, the oath sworn by Joseph's brothers (Gen 50:24–25) ensures that Joseph—specifically his bones—will return to the land. The process of removing Joseph's bones from Egypt (Exod 13:19) and returning them to Canaan (Josh 24:32) not only reflects the yearning of an exilic community but also forms a thread that connects the narratives of the patriarchs with the exodus event and then finally the settlement period.²⁴

Joseph's bones carry much symbolic importance. The hope and promise tied to them relates to an image of repatriated remains, but when compared to Ezek 37, the bones also become an allusion to bodily resurrection. Following Schmid,²⁵ the resurrection allusion is found in Ben Sira's encomium of Israel's ancestors (Sir 49:10–16), which dates to the Hellenistic period.²⁶ The appearance of Joseph is peculiar in this passage, because, as Schmid notes, Joseph is not mentioned with the patriarchs. Instead he appears out of place following the reference to the twelve prophets (49:10), bracketed between Enoch (49:14) and the antediluvian ancestors Seth, Enosh, and finally Adam (49:16).²⁷ The reference to the twelve and the reinvigoration of their bones, “may their bones sprout forth from their place” (תְּהִי עֲצָמָתָם פְּרוּחַת מִתַּחַתָּהֶם), clearly alludes to the resurrected bodies in Ezekiel. But Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is also important in terms of who performs the reburial, namely, Israel's God.²⁸ Divine

22. Schmid, *Genesis*, 214–15.

23. Schmid, *Genesis*, 215–16.

24. Schmid, *Genesis*, 216.

25. Schmid, *Genesis*, 216.

26. See J. J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 97–111. The classic study of Sir 44–50 is B. L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

27. Schmid, *Genesis*, 216.

28. See S. Olyan, “Unnoticed Resonances of Tomb Opening and Transportation of the Remains of the Dead in Ezekiel 37:12–14,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 491–501.

order, as balanced between a people and their deity, is measured according to how Yahweh treats both the living and the dead. The covenants made with the ancestors are binding for all generations, so the God of Israel must account for the dead, even those who die under extraordinary circumstances, such as exile.²⁹

The praise of Joseph, Enosh, Shem, and Seth in Sir 49:15–16 is built upon $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$ and its sense of place and protocol. Here the verbal root in Hebrew has a nuance similar to that in Akkadian: caring for the dead. In 49:15, the *niphal* form of the verb is used to passively describe the condition of the bones: they have been taken care of—in other words, Joseph has been properly buried. There is no mention of bones in 49:16, or burials for that matter, but the same verbal form appears. Again, the sense is transgenerational. Like the Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty, the concept of generations spans the distant dead (Seth, etc.) and eponymous ancestors (Joseph), connecting them with the more recently departed (Simon the Just in Sir 50). Similar to the use of *pāqīdu* in the Old Babylonian genealogy, the Hebrew verb פקד in Sir 49:15–16 signifies the act of caring for a broad range peoples united in death.

The dead and their care form an important theme that runs through Ben Sira's praise. The theme is presented as an act of remembrance, but in its general outline it is similar to Ammi-saduqa's invocation in the Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty. The praise of Joseph and his bones in Ben Sira appears near the end of the poem, just prior to the extended praise of Simon the Just in Sir 50. But the significance of Joseph's bones should be approached within the larger context of this famous "Praise of the Fathers" (Sir 44–50). The poem is inherently transgenerational, and the image of the past is clearly defined through Israel's ancestors according to their relationship with the God of Israel. At the onset of his praise, in Sir 44:7–15, the sage addresses his subject matter more specifically.³⁰ He includes not only those who are well remembered and whose

29. Following a brief description of postexilic leaders (Zerubabel and Nehemiah), Joseph appears in a group whose burials are unaccounted for. This is an oversimplification, of course. But the fact stands that Enoch's preeminence in early Judaism was based largely on his enigmatic fate, which is alluded to in Sir 49:14. Enoch did not die; God took him up to heaven, according to the ambiguous account in Gen 5:24. The burials of Shem, Seth, and Enosh (and Adam for that matter) are also never described in biblical literature and would be superfluous considering that they lived and died prior to the flood. The reference to Joseph within this mysterious group effectively ties the rebirth of the bones of the twelve in 49:10 with the care for the distant dead in vv. 14 and 16. I cannot explain the appearance of Zerubabel and Nehemiah any more than that they constitute more recent figures in Ben Sira's past. There is no mention, however, of their burial or care in 49:11–13.

30. Sirach 44:8–15 is quoted in full at the end of this book. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 134, has suggested that the memorials allow Ben Sira to confront his unease with death, expressed elsewhere in the book (e.g., Sir 11:28).

names continue to be venerated (vv. 7–8) but also those who are no longer known (vv. 9–10). Ben Sira states explicitly that the covenantal relationship of these ancestors with the God of Israel still guides their descendants (Sir 44:14–15).³¹ These verses are important because they reveal the connection between the embodied dead and the ancestral covenants that are tied to them. Religious identification is forged through perceptions of the past that involve “gathering” (גָּסַר) the bodies of the dead in peace, and “caring” (פָּקַד) for their bones, to paraphrase Sir 44:14 and 49:15. This perspective, which emerges from Sir 44–50, underscores the importance of Joseph’s bones in Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua. The dead embodied not only the past but also the promises given to the ancestors.

The Death and Desecration of a Queen

The antipode of Joseph’s death and reburial is the fate of Jezebel. The description of Jezebel’s bones in 1 Kgs 9:34 also draws upon the funerary nuance of פָּקַד, but her body is not properly cared for in death, and the narrative of her bones is one of destruction. Her fate is interwoven with the fall of the house of Ahab,³² it symbolizes the complete annihilation of this dynasty through the horrifyingly graphic destruction of her body. The treatment of the dead here, specifically the extended destruction of Jezebel’s mortal remains, exemplifies the denial of care.

The end of Ahab’s dynasty is prophesied by Elijah in 1 Kgs 21 and carried out by Jehu in 2 Kgs 9–10.³³ The destruction of this royal house culminates with the beheading of Ahab’s seventy sons (2 Kgs 10:1–11). But the beginning of the end unfolds with the assassinations of Joram and his mother, Jezebel, in 2 Kgs 9. The description and interpretation of their fates serve as powerful examples of a bad death and show how nonburial is intrinsically related

31. Sirach 44–49 remembers the piety of the ancestors’ lives rather than the revelatory events of Israel’s past, and the lengthy poem is structured through a reoccurring theme of succession, see Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 99–100. The general idea here is one of divine promises transferred through lineal descent.

32. The prophecy of doom is first delivered to Ahab by Elijah in 1 Kgs 21:17–37, although it is deferred until the time of his son. This probably reflects a tendency in Kings and related biblical literature to deliver oracles of destruction to the father of the dynasty’s last king. This is exemplified in Amos’s oracle against the house of Jeroboam in Amos 7:9, as first pointed out by T. Ishida, “House of Ahab,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 25 (1975): 135–36.

33. On the literary problems and historical issues involved in 1 Kgs 21 and 2 Kgs 9, see R. Bohlen, *Der Fall Nabot: Form, Hintergrund und Werdegang einer alttestamentlichen Erzählung* (1 Kön 21), Trierer Theologische Studien 35 (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1978); M. Oeming, “Naboth, Der Jesreeliter: Untersuchungen zu den theologischen Motiven der Überlieferungsgeschichte von I Reg 21,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 (1986): 363–82; A. Rofé, “The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of the Story,” *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 89–104; H. G. M. Williamson, “Jezreel in the Biblical Text,” *Tel*

to identification—or, rather, its denial. The violent ends met by Joram and Jezebel are actualizations of the curses found in 1 Kgs 21 (and reiterated in 2 Kgs 9), and through a process of redaction and intertextual allusion, their fates are specifically linked to the Naboth incident in 1 Kgs 21:1–16.³⁴

The Assassination of Joram and Jezebel

The accounts of Jezebel's death and that of her son in the books of Kings are heavily redacted by the Deuteronomist(s).³⁵ Redactional work is seen specifically in the dynastic curses of 1 Kgs 21:21–22, 24 (1 Kgs 21:23 is discussed below).³⁶ The

Ariv 18 (1991): 79–89; M. C. White, "Naboth's Vineyard and Jehu's Coup: The Legitimation of a Dynastic Extermination," *Vetus Testamentum* 44 (1994): 66–68; White, *The Elijah Legends and Jehu's Coup*, Brown Judaic Studies 311 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); E. Blum, "Die Nabotüberlieferungen und Kompositionsgeschichte der Vorderen Propheten," in *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift. Festschrift Odil Hannes Steck*, ed. R. G. Kratz, T. Krüger, and K. Schmid, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 300 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 111–28; P. T. Cronauer, *The Stories about Naboth the Jezreelite: A Source, Composition, and Redaction Investigation of 1 Kings 21 and Passages in 2 Kings 9*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 424 (New York: T & T Clark, 2005); and N. Na'aman, "Naboth's Vineyard and the Foundation of Jezreel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 (2008): 197–218.

34. Many scholars see 1 Kgs 21:1–16 as separate and possibly later than the account of Jehu's coup in 2 Kgs 9; see Rofé, "Vineyard," 96–97; Blum, "Die Nabotüberlieferungen," 111–28; Cronauer, *Stories*; and E. A. Knauf, "Inside the Walls of Nehemiah's Jerusalem: Naboth's Vineyard," in *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor of David Ussishkin*, ed. I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 185–94. Although the reasons range from linguistic dating to the interpretation of Jezebel in later tradition, the basis for this interpretation is the tension between 1 Kgs 21:1–16 and 2 Kgs 9:21–26.

35. The paranthetical denunciation in 1 Kgs 21:25–26 seems to be off-message in its religious critique, for example. Furthermore, 1 Kgs 21:1–16 does not contain any Deuteronomistic terminology. The redaction histories proposed for the Naboth stories often involve a prophetic (or pro-Jehu) reworking of earlier materials, because Naboth is integral to the coup narrative in 2 Kgs 9, followed by some variation of Deuteronomistic redaction. The tendency among scholars to date the materials in 2 Kgs 9 earlier is because the prophetic word against Ahab that is recalled by Jehu in verses 25–26 differs from Elijah's denunciation of Ahab in 1 Kgs 21:17–19. Redaction critical approaches would then see 2 Kgs 9:25b–26a as the original core, and 1 Kgs 21:1–16 as a later, literary extrapolation. White, *Elijah Legends*, 36, sees 2 Kgs 9:25b–26a as the core and 1 Kgs 21:1–29 as a literary reworking of Ahab's transgression. Cronauer, *Stories*, 192–93 on the other hand sees 2 Kgs 9:25b–26a as secondary to the account of Jehu's coup and takes 1 Kgs 21:1–16 as a postexilic supplement. Among the similarities between these studies is that both involve a fragmentary hypothesis, dissect prophetic speech, and depend upon earlier oral sources.

36. S. L. McKenzie, "Dog Food and Bird Food: The Oracles against the Dynasties in the Book of Kings," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. G. N. Knoppers and J. G. McConville (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 397–420.

curse imagery here is standard and found elsewhere in the book. For instance, in 1 Kgs 16:3–4, the house of Ba'asha is to fall like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat (compare 1 Kgs 21:21), and all of his dead shall be desecrated out in the open (as in 1 Kgs 21:24).³⁷ But this last image also plays an important role in Jehu's bloody coup in Jezreel, even though the consumption of dead bodies by birds and dogs is only implied in the events that transpire in 2 Kgs 9. The curse alluded to here first appears in 1 Kgs 21:24: "The dead in the city belonging to Ahab will be eaten by dogs, and the dead in the field will be eaten by the birds of the air." This imagery is common in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature,³⁸ but what is interesting in this case is the way it is rendered in narrative.

Elisha's disciple, in his secret anointing of Jehu, repeats the standard Deuteronomistic curse that was previously placed in the mouth of Elijah in 1 Kgs 21:21b–22 (= 2 Kgs 9:8b–9). The reason for this divine anointing is asserted in 2 Kgs 9:7: Jehu is to avenge the blood of Yahweh's servants by killing Jezebel and annihilating the house of Ahab.³⁹ But in 1 Kgs 21:23 (repeated in 2 Kgs 9:10a) the curse is directed specifically at Jezebel because of the Naboth affair: "And Yahweh also spoke against Jezebel saying, 'the dogs will eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel.'"⁴⁰ These words are echoed, with slight alteration, at the end of the disciple's proclamation in 2 Kgs 9:10a. Furthermore, the rehearsal of the same curses in 2 Kgs 9:8b–10a leaves out the threat of corpses exposed in the field and in the city, a threat that was placed after the Jezebel curse in 1 Kgs 21:23–24.⁴¹ This absence is intentional and plays a role in the placement of the dead in 2 Kgs 9.⁴²

37. McKenzie, "Dog Food," 404–5.

38. The classic works on this are D. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and Old Testament Prophets* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964) and Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*. See also M. Cogan, "A Note on Disinterment in Jeremiah," in *Gratz College, Anniversary Volume*, ed. I. D. Passow and S. T. Lachs (Philadelphia: Gratz College, 1971), 29–34.

39. The oracle of doom in 2 Kgs 9 is curious in that it does not address the Israelite king but serves as part of Jehu's divine commissioning; see McKenzie, "Dog Food," 408.

40. The verse appears to be redactional, as it does not employ the usual narrative devices and begins instead with "and also" (וְגַם); see McKenzie, "Dog Food," 405.

41. S. McKenzie, "'My God is YHWH': The Composition of the Elijah Stories in 1–2 Kings," in *Congress Volume: Munich 2013*, ed. C. Maier (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 106 n. 46. The specific curses in 1 Kgs 21:23 and 2 Kgs 9:8b–10a (along with 9:36–37) may be the product of an anti-Jezebel redaction.

42. The precise spatial terminology shifts in 1 Kgs 9, which suggests that the different descriptions of the area where the king's body was thrown belong to different sources. The place where Joram's body is discarded is described in 2 Kgs 9:25 as the "plot of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite" (חֵלקַת שָׂדֵה נָבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאֵלִי), while in v. 21 it is called "the plot of Naboth the

Jehu assassinates Joram outside of the walls of Jezreel, and the usurper instructs his officer to discard the former king in the surrounding fields, telling him twice to take the body and throw it aside in a plot of ground (2 Kgs 9:25a). Jehu justifies this order, which is a clear denial of burial, by citing an oracle against Ahab (2 Kgs 9:25b–26) that called for blood retribution for the death of Naboth and his sons. Among the odd things about this prophecy is that Naboth's sons are not mentioned anywhere in 1 Kgs 21.⁴³ Nevertheless the additional blood vengeance for Naboth's sons stresses the story's generational concerns. The full implication of Naboth's loss meant the eradication of his lineage from Jezreel. On the other hand Ahab is allowed to live, although the words of 1 Kgs 21:19, where dogs lick Ahab's blood, foreshadow Ahab's fate in 1 Kgs 22:38.⁴⁴ In fact, the deferral of this prophecy in 1 Kgs 21:29b—"in the days of [Ahab's] son I will bring destruction to his house"—makes the curse acutely transgenerational.

The imprecations originally delivered to Ahab are initially realized when Joram is killed, and his death is followed by that of his mother. In both cases, the actions associated with their bodies directly relate to the denial of burial spoken in the dynasty's curse. This begins with the semantic similarities of the verbs used to describe their disposal: Joram is killed and his body thrown (השליך), while Jezebel is dropped (שמט) to her death from her palace window. In 2 Kgs 9:36–37, the destruction of Jezebel's remains is taken as a fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy in 1 Kgs 21:23.⁴⁵ In 2 Kgs 9:17–26, the account of Joram's assassination is clearly set outside of Jezreel's walls, in the "plot (חלקה) of the field Naboth the Jezreelite" (v. 25a), while 2 Kgs 9:30–37, the narrative

Jezreelite," and in v. 26 it is simply referenced (twice) as the "plot" (חלקה). In 2 Kgs 9:36–37, Jezebel's remains were discarded in the "portion of Jezreel" (חלק יזרעאל) and the "field" (שדה) of this portion, respectively.

43. The curiosity of 2 Kgs 9:25b–26 is that Jehu quotes a prophecy that is not found in 1 Kgs 21, and he does not attribute this prophecy to Elijah directly. The prophetic word referenced in 2 Kgs 9:26a specifically mentions the blood of Naboth's sons, who are not mentioned in 1 Kgs 21. Finally, Jehu and his officer Bidkar do not appear anywhere in 1 Kgs 21. See McKenzie, "Dog Food," 403–16.

44. J. Gray, *I & II Kings: Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1970), 455 and White, "Naboth's Vineyard," 71–73. It should be stressed that the death of Ahab in 1 Kgs 22 involves several literary problems. For different views, see J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 286–89 and Suriano, *Politics*, 73–74.

45. Since the latter passage (1 Kgs 21:23) was probably inserted into the standard Deuteronomistic curses in 1 Kgs 21:20–22, 24, its citation in 2 Kgs 9:36 is probably also a later addition. The literary block of 1 Kgs 21 and 2 Kgs 9 (in MT), however, was carefully reworked in order to fulfill prophecies of doom applied to Ahab's lineage.

of Jezebel's violent fate is placed inside Jezreel's walls. When Jehu rides into the city gate, Jezebel is dropped from her palace window to the ground, where her blood splatters across the wall. Jehu's horse then tramples Jezebel's crushed body (vv. 31–33). The fates of Joram and his mother each allude to the Deuteronomistic curse in 1 Kgs 21:24; Jezebel was the “dead belonging to Ahab in the city [eaten] by dogs” (2 Kgs 9:36; cf. 1 Kgs 21:23 and 2 Kgs 9:10a) while Joram was the “dead in the field [eaten] by birds of the heavens.” The omission of 1 Kgs 21:23 when the curses were inserted in 2 Kgs 9:7b–10a was thus a deliberate literary strategy meant to point to the prophetic curse's fulfillment.

The Destruction of Jezebel's Body

The death of Jezebel, unlike that of her son, is extensively described in 2 Kgs 9. The desecration of Joram's body is implied but not described beyond the careless discarding of his corpse. The destruction of Jezebel's body on the other hand is portrayed in gruesome detail in 2 Kgs 9:30–37, embodying ideologies of death that touch upon issues of identity as well as memory. Jezebel's presentation in verses 30–32 and the violent desecration of her person in verses 33b–37 combine to create and frame the complete destruction of an Israelite queen's name and status. Upon Jehu's arrival in Jezreel, Jezebel prepared herself and confronted the usurper through her palace window, high above him. She is initially presented as royalty in this scene,⁴⁶ properly adorned and flanked by servants.⁴⁷ As several studies

46. M. A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 335. In 2 Kgs 9:30, Jezebel confronts Jehu and thus her own fate. The point in describing her personal preparation, the makeup on her eyes and face, is to create a visage of power and prestige, peering out at Jehu from the palace—hence the woman at the window. The point of this image is not to suggest that Jezebel intended to seduce Jehu; see S. Parker, “Jezebel's Reception of Jehu,” *Maarav* 1 (1978): 67–78. But it is possible to read in this passage images of beauty and desirability that become combined with death and destruction and inscribed in the feminine form; see U. Schmidt, *Zentrale Randfiguren: Strukturen der Darstellung von Frauen in den Erzählungen der Königebücher* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 149–50.

47. J. Everhart, “Jezebel: Framed by Eunuchs?,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 688–98 has shown that the eunuchs serve multiple literary purposes here, not just as the characters that defenestrate Jezebel. As attendant figures standing beside Jezebel, they enhance her status as queen. But they also represent liminality, not unlike Jezebel herself who plays the role of a powerful woman in a patriarchal world. It is tempting to pursue the liminality aspect further in this text, particularly with the image of the window, since it is through the window that Jezebel makes her last appearance as a queen, and her passage through this window results in her death.

have noted,⁴⁸ the image of Jezebel's last stand evokes the well-known iconographic motif of the woman in the window. But in the end she becomes like manure spread across the fields, trampled beneath the feet of Jehu's horse. Therefore it is important to closely examine the depiction of her death, because it is described in stages. The description of each stage of death is depicted through her body.

And [Jehu] he said: "Drop her!" And they dropped her,⁴⁹ and her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and it trampled her.³⁴ Now he went and ate and drank, and he said: "Take care of that accursed woman, and bury her, because she is the daughter of a king."³⁵ And they went to bury her but could not find her, except for the skull, the feet, and the palm of the hands.³⁶ And they returned and told him, and he said, "This is the word of Yahweh that was spoken by the hand of his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying: "In the field of Jezreel the dogs will eat the flesh of Jezebel.""³⁷ And the destruction⁵⁰ of Jezebel's corpse was so like dung upon the field in the portion of Jezreel that no one could say: "This is Jezebel."

Jezebel's violent death is only the beginning of her body's destruction. A short while after her death, Jehu orders proper funerary rites for her (v. 34b): "Take care of (פקדו נא) that accursed woman, and bury her, because she is the daughter of a King." In the first word of this statement we again encounter the use of פקד in relation to the dead. The specific context of its use is attending to, or caring for, the dead, similar to Akkadian *pāqīdu*.⁵¹ As in the case of its use in

48. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 111–12 and E. F. Beach, "The Samaria Ivories, *Marzeah*, and Biblical Text," *Biblical Archaeologist* 56 (1993): 94–104.

49. Following *qere* instead of *ketiv* (שמטרו).

50. The first word is amended from *והיה* (*qere*) and revocalized as "destruction" following the suggestion by J. Walsh, "On היה in 2 Kings 9:37," *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 152–53. The suggestion takes the orthographic form as a *היה* variant of the noun *היה* based on the *ketiv* of Job 6:2 (*היה* 'my calamity'). Although the revocalization is rejected by G. A. Rendsburg, "Notes on 2 Kings 9:36–37," *Vetus Testamentum* 66 (2016): 317–23, this particular noun (*היה*) is used to express personal destruction in Job 6:2 and as a threat to the psalmist's person in Ps 57:2. In fact the word's usage in Ps 5:10 provides an apt image for 2 Kgs 9:37. In this psalm the plural form, "destructions" or "destructiveness" is synthetically paralleled with an image of a violated burial: "Their innermost is destructiveness // their throats an opened tomb" (קרבם הוות קבר פתוח גרונו).

51. Lewis, *Cults*, 120–22. Note the cuneiform texts Lewis cites at 121 n. 56.

the traditions of Joseph's bones (Sir 49:15), the verbal root פקד in 2 Kgs 9:34b reflects the interaction of the living with the dead.

Jehu's rationale for burying Jezebel also reveals the social dimension of mortuary practices. Because of her status as a Phoenician princess, Jezebel is to be given proper rites of burial, along with everything else involved in the care (פקד) for the dead. Jehu's statement refers to her royal identity,⁵² described in terms that are established earlier in 1 Kgs 16:31 where she is identified as the "daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians." Not surprisingly, her political role as queen mother (2 Kgs 10:13) is ignored. In the end, however, Jezebel is denied any burial because Jehu's men are able to find only a few scattered remains (2 Kgs 9:35).⁵³ Apparently the condition of her body was such that it precluded the rites and protocols that came with פקד. The description of Jezebel's parts relates to three different realms of her body—head, feet, and hands—but this may have meant to indicate that what remained were insufficient for proper ritual care. These body parts provide forensic proof that Jezebel's corporeal form has been destroyed,⁵⁴ and this underscores the interpretation in 2 Kgs 9:36–37 as the fate prophesied for her in 1 Kgs 21:23 and 2 Kgs 9:10a. Although no dogs are mentioned in 2 Kgs 9:33–35, the assumption here is that animals consumed Jezebel's exposed corpse.⁵⁵

Finally, the prophetic citation summarizes her demise by using the term "dung" (דמן) as an analogy for what becomes of "Jezebel's corpse" (נבלת איזבל). The term here (דמן) is found in Ps 83:11 and in the book of Jeremiah. This word is only used of corpses,⁵⁶ and Jeremiah's repeated use illustrates its force here in Kings. The term (דמן) was always the result of disrupted mortuary practices, and this is often expressed verbally through a chain of terms that serve as its antithesis: "mourn" (ספר), "gather" (אסף), and "bury" (קבר). For instance,

52. Lewis, *Cults*, 51.

53. F. Stavropoulou, "Gog's Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11–20," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 74.

54. J. McKinlay, "Negotiating the Frame for Viewing the Death of Jezebel," *Biblical Interpretation* 10 (2002): 318–19 makes a good case for looking at these gruesome details as an attempt to destroy the embodied attributes of Jezebel as queen and mother. In anticipation of Jehu's arrival, Jezebel had prepared herself to die like a queen (2 Kgs 9:30), but her physical being was reduced to a few scattered remains.

55. The picture of Jehu feasting inside the palace can also be read as a reflection of what was happening to Jezebel outside the palace, where dogs feasted upon her remains; see D. Appler, "From Queen to Cuisine: Food Imagery in the Jezebel Narrative," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 66–67, citing D. N. Fewell and D. M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 171 and McKinlay, "Negotiating," 308.

56. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 113.

in Jer 25:33: “They will not be mourned, and they will not be gathered, and they will not be buried; they will serve as dung for the surface of the ground.” In Jer 8:1–2, the bones of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, including Judah’s former kings, will be exhumed and desecrated, becoming dung. Thus, the curse imagery evoked at the beginning of 2 Kgs 9:37 has a specific cultural context. Furthermore, the condition of Jezebel’s corpse (נבלה) as “dung” is given spatial significance, for it is defiled in an area that is prophetically linked with Naboth’s fate (השדה בחלק יזרעאל).⁵⁷

The Implications of a Bad Death

The subtext behind the deaths of Naboth, Joram, and Jezebel is that each is denied proper entombment. To take this point further, their postmortem memory is deprived of any material form. This is stressed in the case of Jezebel, and it is instructive to contrast the fate of her corpse with the memorialization of the dead through funerary monuments. The Hebrew funerary epitaphs from Jerusalem’s elite cemetery in Silwan (specifically *Silw* 1 and *Silw* 4) can serve as constructive examples of what Jezebel is deprived of in 2 Kgs 9:33–37. The essence of the royal steward’s tomb in *Silw* 1 is described simply as the bones of the dead; there was nothing else there of value, according to his epitaph. The preservation of his remains (along with those of his concubine) was thus a cultural imperative.⁵⁸ It was meant to safeguard against a fate such as Jezebel’s.

In both cases, the bones are introduced using the same syntactical form. In *Silw* 1:2 and 2 Kgs 9:35b, *כי אם* following a negative clause indicates exception. The Royal Steward Inscription (*Silw* 1) uses this syntax to stress that the bones should not be disturbed. From the perspective of this inscription, the bones are the most valuable content of the tomb. They establish the presence of the dead and hence preserve the dead person’s identity. Together these functions are reflected in the inscription’s first words: “This is the sepulcher of [PN], the royal steward” (זאת [קברת] יהו אשר על הבית). The opening syntax of *Silw* 1 (and *Silw* 4) echoes the description of Jezebel’s state when Jehu’s men attend to her remains.⁵⁹ The scattered parts were too few to allow for a proper

57. In 2 Kgs 21:23 (MT), *הל* should be amended to *חלק* based on 1 Kgs 9:10a, 37.

58. Olyan, “Unnoticed Resonances,” 495.

59. Following the negative statement “they did not find her” (לא מצאו בה), the exception (introduced by *כי אם*) lists the specific body parts without any possessive suffixes. It is “the skull,” not “her skull.”

burial. As a result, there could never be a monument in Jezreel bearing the words “This is Jezebel” (זאת איזבל; 2 Kgs 9:37b). There is nothing uniquely funereal about the expression כי אם ‘except for,’ nor is it an uncommon or unusual grammatical form. But in these texts, which share a funerary interest, its occurrence at least highlights the significance of bones in ideologies of death. Likewise, the declaration “that no one will say, ‘This is Jezebel!’” can be interpreted in different ways. It could allude to the fact that Jezebel’s body was never fully recovered (i.e., no one was able to say “here is her body”), thus fulfilling the prophetic curse. But the comparison with funerary inscriptions is apt. In *Silw* 2, the inscription begins by declaring: “This is the sepulcher of . . . the royal steward.” It then states that the funerary monument contains nothing “except for” the bones of the steward and his companion. In contrast, 2 Kgs 9:34–37 explains that there is no funerary monument declaring “This is Jezebel,” because there was nothing left of her “except for” a few scarce bone fragments. Overall, the language that is used in this passage is multivalent, and on a certain level it alludes to funerary inscriptions.

The narrative of Jezebel’s fate creates a complicated picture that culminates with the final statement in 2 Kgs 9:37 on the complete destruction of Jezebel’s personhood. The discourse of her body leading up to this point begins with the splatter of her blood (דם in v. 33), and it implies that dogs consumed “the flesh of Jezebel” (בשר איזבל, v. 36). Regarding this last image, each citation of Elijah’s earlier prophecy against Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:23) contains additional wording.⁶⁰ The repetition of the curse in 2 Kgs 9:10a concludes with the proviso, “and no one to bury [Jezebel]” (ואין קבר), while 2 Kgs 9:36b ends with the specific mention of her flesh. This comment regarding her flesh is an explanation of excarnation, the defleshing of the corpse, as it is made in direct response to the report of Jezebel’s otherwise unrecognizable body parts in 2 Kgs 9:35. The anticipation created in 2 Kgs 9:10a and 36b underscores the comprehensive destruction of the queen’s body as she is dropped to her death, her blood splattered, her body trampled by horses and eaten by dogs, eventually to be turned to excrement. The extensive description is a process of destruction that stands at the opposite of every aspect of an ideal death. Her name is not immortalized in a manner that could be afforded the aristocracy, as seen in the monuments of Jerusalem’s elite cemetery in Silwan. The process of destruction does not stop with Jezebel’s death, met beneath

60. McKinlay, “Negotiating,” 316 and P. Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 78–79.

her palace window, but continues in a horrifying fashion.⁶¹ Unlike Joseph, Jezebel's bones are unattended and denied care. Her fate symbolized the absolute destruction of her royal house, but it also signified discontinuity. The care refused Jezebel's bones was a denial of immortality in the functional sense.

Conclusion

In the Hebrew Bible, survival after death is a concept that is tied to the body. Unlike ancient Egypt where individual bodies are ritually reconstructed through mummification, postmortem existence in the Hebrew Bible occurs through the careful collection of bones. But this afterlife was not one of the dead languishing inside the tomb. Entombed bones were important and meaningful symbols in the Old Testament's ideology of death. The traditions of Joseph's reburial reveal the various ways in which the ideals of the afterlife were embodied. The narratives that were bound to the dead body in this case reflect divine promises given to ancestors. The key term in the narrative of Joseph's bones is פקד 'care'. The word provides an important link between the dead and Israel's divine relationship with Yahweh. Death is relational and, in this example, transgenerational. Care for the dead was not exclusively the responsibility of the living but could be a covenantal obligation of the deity as well. Joseph's reburial symbolizes the fulfillment of Yahweh's first covenant with Israel's ancestors (Gen 15). In Josh 24:32, Joseph's reburial in Shechem marks the inheritance of his descendants, but his bones also symbolically represent the fourth generation of Abraham's progeny, who returned to the land at the appointed time in history (Gen 15:16).⁶²

The narrative of Jezebel's bones is one of annihilation, not afterlife. But like the story of Joseph, the story of Jezebel's dead body is also one of divine fulfillment. The gruesome and graphic details of her corpse's destruction were deemed necessary by the biblical writers in order to show that her fate fulfilled the prophetic curses leveled at her and her royal house. The point of this destruction went beyond her nonburial. The denial of care (פקד) in this

61. To quote McKinlay, "Negotiating," 319 on Jezebel's death: "for if human corpses have the power to disturb, lying between the living and non-living, and indeed a fragmented corpse even more so, a corpse whose chewed remains have been incorporated into the stomachs of dogs to end as dung lying on the ground, leaves an even more profound sense of disturbance and disquiet, as the disturbing horror of a life/death anomaly." McKinlay (316) also saw significance in the use of the word בשר, 'flesh' in 2 Kgs 9:36. The description of Jezebel's body parts in 2 Kgs 9:35 is explained in the next verse as having been defleshed by dogs.

62. Joseph can be considered a segmentation of Abraham's linear genealogy in Genesis; see B. D. Cox and S. Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 138–39.

instance may appear subtle, but it is significant. There was to be nothing left of Jezebel. Not just her physical remains, but also her memory—no sign or monument. The annihilation of Jezebel's corpse symbolized the destruction of the royal house of Ahab. But in this classic example of a bad death, the denial of care for Jezebel's body reveals how status is assigned to the dead. The destruction of Jezebel's bones stands in contrast with the preservation of Joseph's precisely because of their respective status among the ranks of the dead in the Hebrew Bible. It may seem ironic that Jezebel is remembered in the literature of the Hebrew Bible, but she is remembered for her demise. For the biblical writers Jezebel was not an ancestor. The narrative that her death embodied was one of curses rather than blessings.

The Tomb and the Identity of the Dead

"THE ASHES OF our ancestors are sacred and their final resting place is hallowed ground, while you wander away from the tombs of your fathers seemingly without regret." These words come from a speech purportedly made by Chief Seattle in 1854, published in a US newspaper a few decades later in 1887.¹ They speak to concerns of territoriality, but the words juxtapose Western religion with Native American spirituality by focusing on their contrasting beliefs regarding the afterlife. The letter goes on to state: "Our religion is the traditions of our ancestors . . . your dead cease to love you and the homes of their nativity as soon as they pass the portals of the tomb. They wander far off beyond the stars, are soon forgotten, and never return. Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being." Ancestors are the point of comparison. The presence of the dead, according to Chief Seattle, creates a bond between a people and their land. By contrast, the Christian belief in the soul's ascent divorces the dead from such significance among the living. The ancestors are no longer present; they are in some ethereal place. The quote provides a constructive prompt for the study of the tomb in various biblical narratives, not only because of the way it associates ancestors with the tomb and contrasts this association with a heavenly afterlife but also because of its implications regarding how we read mortuary practices.

We have seen already this idea of ancestors in the work of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, as discussed in the introduction. Fustel de Coulanges even related this idea to biblical traditions, citing Abraham and the divine

1. The quotations here follow Version 1 of Chief Seattle's treaty oration, originally published in the *Seattle Sunday Star*, October, 29, 1887; for the speech see W. Safire, ed., *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* (New York: Norton, 2004), 690–94.

promise of land in Gen 15:7 as one example.² In another example drawn from classical sources, Fustel de Coulanges described the connection between the dead and inheritance of land in terms that related the soul to the tomb, stating: “these souls of the dead extended tutelary action and with it their right of property, even to the boundaries of the domain.”³ This image contrasts starkly with that of souls ascending to heaven (or descending into hell). Archaeology provides general support for linking inheritance rights with mortuary practices, when necessarily qualified (see, e.g., Arthur Saxe’s Hypothesis 8). But the concepts of ancestors and the localization of their burial sites were much more complicated than simply land rights, as was shown in the previous chapter. The tomb played a role in establishing identities, and the treatment of the dead concomitant with the tomb could also form narratives that lent themselves to religious and political ideologies. The reburial of Joseph’s bones in the promised land conveyed more than territoriality. His bones symbolized covenantal faithfulness and were emblematic of an idea of the past that created societal bonds.

The conceptual link between ancestors and the tomb is biblical, as the previous chapter has shown. But what does this mean? The tomb and related ideas of ancestry were tied to notions of identity. To understand how identity worked, this chapter will first discuss the heuristic sense of the word *identity* before looking at different examples of burial described in the Hebrew Bible: the deaths of the matriarchs Sarah and Rachel in Genesis and the story of the man of God from Judah in Kings. The biblical examples will include both good deaths and bad deaths, as did the previous chapter, but here the term *identity* will serve as a guide for understanding how these categories of mortality worked.

The Tomb and Identity

One does not have to look far in the Hebrew Bible to find positive examples of family tombs. When asked to join David on his return to Jerusalem, for example, Barzilai chose to stay in his Transjordanian homeland. He responded by requesting that he live out his last days in his own town so that he could be buried with his parents (2 Sam 19:38). In his request to travel to Jerusalem, Nehemiah similarly refers to the city as the place where the tombs of his

2. N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 66.

3. Fustel de Coulanges, *Ancient City*, 66. The example comes from Cato the Elder.

ancestors, “my fathers,” are located (Neh 2:3). The idea behind these biblical statements is not unlike those of Chief Seattle. The family tomb is important because the ancestors are located within its confines. The concern is one of identity. In all of these cases, the living identify with the tomb through kinship terminology. This is consistent with the words used for ancestors in the Hebrew Bible, which are drawn from kinship terminology. Death is relational, and as such, the afterlife ideal in the Hebrew Bible is largely based on kinship-based identity. The rituals surrounding the dead involve the individual and relate to the transition of the dead from one state to another. This process accounts for identity, both individually (concerning the self) and collectively with the ancestors.

The term *identity* has a general heuristic sense that has already come into play in my discussion of transition rituals. Death prompts a change in identity, and the process of dying involves the marginalization of identity. The body is no longer who it was in life, it is no longer a member of the living, and it is physically separated through acts of burial. On a certain level, the body is divested of its selfhood through funerary rituals. As a corpse, the marginalized body must transition to ancestor status. In this sense the general rubrics for identity are defined by the dichotomy of individual versus collective. The nature of each of these categories has been examined in the previous chapters, but here the term *identity* is probed further in order to better understand the processes within which identity is constructed relative to each category. Identity is thus understood in a similar manner as ritual. If death is understood as a transition, as a dynamic process marked through the biological changes of the corpse, it follows that the identification of the deceased is patterned accordingly. The identification of the dead and the ritualization of death go hand in hand—both are mediated by the living.

The term *identity* has both strong and weak meanings.⁴ Its weak meaning is contingent upon cultural factors—such as larger institutional forces, if we follow Michel Foucault, for example—and, as such, is variable and in flux. This definition is referred to as weak because its meaning is malleable; identity can mean multiple things. The strong meaning involves a tenuous sense of permanency; in this sense identity is something fixed and unchanging. The essentialism that goes with identity, understood in this strong meaning, brings with it other problems. Ethnic identity, for example, is often discussed

4. The discussion of identity in this chapter follows the important work of R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, “Beyond “Identity,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 10–11.

in the strong sense.⁵ Rather than define identity, it is better to look at *identification* as an action. This approach allows us to observe who is identifying, what (or whom) this identifier is identifying, and how this act is performed. I have already discussed Iron II Judah in these terms, as I have defined Judahite identity through mortuary practices that developed over time and were contingent upon cultural factors. These practices identified the dead as individuals and as collectives. The process of identification was operative in these cultural practices and led to the formation of ancestral identities that played important roles in Judahite society.

The working definition of *culture* as a set of symbolic constructs, historically communicated and perpetuated among a group of people,⁶ can be productively applied to mortuary practices. Communal burials, so important in Iron II Judah and so prominent in biblical tradition, are one such symbolic construct. The bench tomb distinguished Judah from its neighbors. This tomb type stood apart from other forms of burial and contrasted with the monumental funerary culture of Egypt. Judahite inhumation also differed from the practice of cremation found among the Phoenicians and Luwians. The bench tomb engaged identity on a collective level, which not only distinguished Judah from neighboring cultures but also created a wider sense of community through ancestors. Yet the practices found in Judahite burials also engaged the individual on the level of the self. In these practices *identity* can take on a nexus of meanings that relate to the situation of death and the context of burial.

The term *identity* in discussions of mortuary practices, particularly in the sense of marginalization, can apply to categories that are socially defined. The most notable social context is that of the family, evident in texts such as Lev 21:1–3. The obligations to the dead that motivated mortuary practice and ancestor veneration were driven primarily by who the dead were in life. The institutional forces and cultural discourses that construct the self are also involved in the formation of collective identities. In both cases, the tomb serves as a context for identification. Inside the tomb, identity can be stabilized. As such, the tomb also becomes a mechanism for the control of the body. A tomb embodies decisions that were once made regarding whom to bury and how to bury them. This embodiment relates to the operation of identity and goes back to the social obligation toward the dead. The process of identification through

5. The problem is that ethnicity is often defined according to essential characteristics assigned to a particular group. As such, it exists as an external category that scholars impose upon historical actors.

6. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87–89.

mortuary practices thus involves questions of who is doing the identifying as well as the categories deployed.

The social setting for the process of identification engages other categories as well, specifically those of good death versus bad death. The denial of burial for Jezebel, as was shown in the previous chapter, was an act of denying her identity. Jezebel's bad death was part of Jehu's coup. It was the ultimate act of divesting her of a royal identity, as queen mother and matriarch of the Omride dynasty. Yet the story is curious because Jehu decides to bury her remains on account of her identity as the daughter of a Phoenician king. In this biblical account, identity works in different ways and hinges upon the disposal of the dead. But it also reveals the complicated nature of identification. Even if Jehu's officers had found enough of Jezebel's body to allow for proper interment rituals, it would still have fallen short of the ideal burial. Jezebel's fate raises the question of what constitutes a good death, and to answer this question we must consider the role of the tomb in operations of identity.

The descriptions of the dead in the final accounts of Sarah and Rachel in Genesis, along with the peculiar tale of prophets in Bethel in 1 Kgs 13 and 2 Kgs 23, reveal the critical role mortuary practices play in stabilizing the identity of the dead. Once we explicate these texts, we will have a better understanding of identification and death—or rather, the process of dying—as well as the role of the body involved in this process. The treatment of the body, the body's status, and its placement in the burial site relate to concepts of post-mortem existence. Yet each case is unique, and together they illustrate the different ways the afterlife could be embodied in the dead by means of a tomb.

The Death and Burial of Matriarchs

Two related texts in Genesis, both regarding the death of a matriarch, offer a trove of information regarding death, dying, and the negotiation of identity. The terms used to describe the burials of Sarah (Gen 23) and Rachel (Gen 35:16–20) reveal the complexity of dying as a social process. The accounts differ in that Sarah and Rachel are buried in different places, although both belong to the family of Abraham as wife (Sarah) and granddaughter-in-law (Rachel). Placement is essential in both cases, for the interments of Sarah and Rachel establish burial sites that become important for reckoning ancestral identities that are collective (the Cave of Machpelah),⁷ as well as individual (the Sepulcher of Rachel).

7. See the recent treatment by F. Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 473 (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

Sarah and the Cave of Machpelah

Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is a foundation story for the family tomb used by the patriarchs in Genesis, but it is also the first description of burial in the Hebrew Bible. The descriptive account begins with Sarah's death and involves two principal activities: a funerary ritual and the negotiation of a legal transaction. The two are related, in that the transaction is the legal transfer of the burial plot: the Cave of Machpelah at the edge of the field of Ephron in Mamre (see Gen 23:18). The one element thus depends upon the other, and this point is critical as we analyze the narrative. Scholars have typically concentrated upon the second element, the negotiation of the sale, through problematic approaches and with inconclusive results.⁸ Is this account a theological localization of the wandering ancestors,⁹ where the promise of the land is affirmed by the burial of the matriarch (and subsequently the patriarchs)? The text is hardly theological, nor is it polemical in any way. Some would point to the lack of theological language in the text and suggest instead that the account assumes traditions of land rights or is meant as a paradigm for burial.¹⁰ The purpose of the chapter was probably a combination of both factors, but to suggest this compromise is at least to highlight the importance of the depicted act of burial.¹¹ A critical issue in Gen 23 is the propriety of placing the dead, and a key aspect of this problem is revealed in how Sarah is depicted following her death.

The chapter is divided into multiple sections, with several subsections: Sarah's death and Abraham's mourning (vv. 1–2), the negotiation of the burial site (vv. 3–16), and the establishment of the Cave of Machpelah as the family tomb of Abraham and Sarah (vv. 17–20).¹² The basic framework of this

8. On the problematic approaches (mainly orientalizing tendencies), see N. MacDonald, "Driving a Hard Bargain? Genesis 23 and Models of Economic Exchange," in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach*, ed. L. J. Lawrence and M. I. Aguilar (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 79–80 and Stavrakopoulou, *Land*, 33–37.

9. See, e.g., G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1972), 249–50.

10. Several commentaries have noted the lack of any theological language in this text; see J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner's, 1910), 339 and C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 376. For a full discussion of the theme of land rights, see Stavrakopoulou, *Land*, 29–53.

11. According to Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 376, Gen 23 "is concerned with the procedure of burial, the necessary presupposition of which is the legal acquisition of a piece of land."

12. See also the source critical division of C. Levin, "Abraham erwirbt seine Grablege (Genesis 23)," in "Gerechtigkeit und recht zu üben" (Gen 18, 19). *Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum*

literary division is marked by the repetition of the narrative preterite form ויקם (vv. 3, 7, and importantly 17 and 20).¹³ In the first two verses, the verbal form describes the physical actions of Abraham, its subject,¹⁴ “and he arose,” while the second set of examples indicates the establishment of the burial site as property. In fact, Abraham’s physical actions preface both the narrative and the dialogue, beginning in verse 2b with “and Abraham came”¹⁵ [ויבא אברהם] to lament for Sarah . . .” In verses 3 and 7 the narration states that Abraham “arose” (ויקם) to plead his case,¹⁶ and in verses 7 and 12 he bows down (וישתחו) before the “people of the land” and the “sons of the Hittites” (v. 7). The physicality of Abraham’s presence in this episode punctuates his discourse with the community of Hebron, specifically Ephron.¹⁷ The severity of the episode is conveyed throughout the dialogue in verses 3–15 by means of peculiar syntax. The speech of the Hittites, for example, is marked by an unusual use of the precative particle לוֹ (א) ‘please’.¹⁸ This is followed by the imperative of שמעו

65. *Geburtstag*, ed. R. Achenbach and M. Arneth, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 97–104.

13. Noted also by Levin, “Abraham,” 99.

14. According to Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 373, the verb indicates that the patriarch was prostrated in mourning, necessitating his change in position.

15. Westermann (*Genesis 12–36*, 373) had suggested that the auxiliary verbal form ויבא ‘and he went’ actually expresses the initial ritual action. This would then imply that ויקם represents the completion of certain actions (possibly mourning and lament).

16. E. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 170. Levin, “Abraham,” 99 rejects this reading and sees the repetition (*Wiederaufnahme*) as a later redaction.

17. The autochthonous inhabitants of Hebron are described throughout the text as the Hittites (literally, sons of Heth). The specific witnesses (aside from Ephron) are two general groups of peoples: the people of the land (vv. 7, 12–13) and those at the city gate (v. 10). R. Westbrook, “Purchase of the Cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23),” *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971): 37 suggested that the multiple parties indicate a legal practice of double transfer, which involves both the property owner and the sovereign.

18. Speiser, *Genesis*, 170 and D. Sivan and W. Schniedewind, “Letting Your ‘Yes’ Be ‘No’ in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Asseverative לא and הלא,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38 (1993): 222–23. My understanding of this particle runs counter to that of C. Rabin, “L- with Imperative (Gen. XXIII),” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13 (1968): 113–24. Rabin objected to the precative interpretation because the syntactic arrangement of the particle (–לו) followed by an imperative is otherwise unseen in elsewhere in Hebrew or other Semitic languages. Yet the use of quotation marker לאמר is never followed by pronominal preposition in Hebrew; see Sivan and Schniedewind, “Letting Your ‘Yes’ Be ‘No,’” 222. Earlier commentators such as Skinner, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 336–37 noted that the consistent appearance of לוֹ in the passage indicates a uniform function.

‘hear’, with the meaning “agree” (vv. 5–6, 11, and 14–15),¹⁹ which is emulated in Abraham’s speech in verse 13. Furthermore, the performative sense of the present suffix form נתתי ‘I (hereby) give’ in the interchange between Ephron (used three times in v. 11) and Abraham (v. 13), is indicative of the situation’s immediacy.²⁰ The urgency involves placing the dead, and repeated use of the imperative verbal form of “bury” (קבר) always follows a statement regarding the transfer of property, be it the “choicest of our tombs” first suggested by the Hittites (v. 6) or Ephron’s field (vv. 11 and 15). The necessity of the transaction, given the situation, is evident in the exasperated words of Abraham (v. 13ab–b),²¹ “O that you would please agree with me! I hereby give the field’s price. Take [it] from me, that I may bury my dead there!” These words express the issue at stake regarding Sarah and her identity—she required a place to be buried—and this issue is dependent upon Abraham’s actions and the final placement of Sarah’s dead body “there” (שמה).

Sarah’s postmortem portrayal during the tense dialogue of Gen 23:3–15 is interesting, because she is never identified by name but instead is referred to as an object. Her name, and reference to her status as Abraham’s wife, occurs only at the beginning of the chapter and at the end, once she is buried (vv. 1–2 and 19). Yet her dead body is a topic of discussion throughout the discourse. Following verse 2, the unburied matriarch is neither mentioned by name nor referenced as Abraham’s wife. Instead, she is called a מֵתָה, which is a *qal* masculine singular participle.²² In an extreme state of marginality, Sarah is robbed of all forms of identity, including gender. As such, she is divested of selfhood,

19. Speiser, *Genesis*, 170 and Westbrook, “Purchase,” 35–36 compared it with the use of Akkadian *šemû* in Neo-Babylonian legal texts.

20. B. K. Waltke and M. P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), § 30.5.2d refer to this form as the “perfective of resolve.” See also M. Sternberg, “Double Cave, Double Talk: The Indirections of Biblical Dialogue,” in “Not in Heaven”: *Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. J. P. Rosenblatt and J. C. Sitterson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 40. Sternberg, “Double Cave,” 229 n. 11 also notes (citing M. Greenberg) that the verbal form could be a performative, “I (hereby) give.” The key term in this passage is נתן; see MacDonald, “Driving a Hard Bargain?,” 90–91.

21. In Hebrew: *אך אם אתה לו שמעני נתתי כסף השדה קח ממני ואקברה את מתי שמה*.

22. Abraham refers to her as “my dead one” (מֵתָה) three times, and the sons of Heth refer to her as “your dead one” (מֵתָה) four times. According to Westermann, *Genesis* 12–36, 371, the word is both masculine and feminine. Yet this would be odd for a participle, especially considering that a feminine form exists for this root (see Gen 35:18). Furthermore, Westermann cites Gesenius on this point, yet the grammar itself (*GKC* § 122 f) says that masculine nominative forms are rarely used for both genders. *GKC* goes on to explain מֵתָה in Gen 23 as an object (“a dead body”) that belongs to a woman, apparently distinguishing it from an indelible element of identity that would correspond to the gender of the referent.

existing as an object rather than as a person, awaiting the completion of the ritual when she can regain her identity inside the controlled environment of the tomb.

The spatial significance of the body relative to both the living (Abraham) and the dead (the cave tomb) is seen in the subtle nuance of the patriarch's words, which give Sarah's body an immediate sense of place. Abraham twice refers to Sarah's body as "my dead before me" (מחי מלפני). Indeed, following the prologue of verses 1–2, the statement of verse 3 ("and Abraham arose from before his dead") establishes the imminent problem of placement that follows. Sarah's marginalized identity exists until the problem of placement is resolved in Gen 23:16 with the agreement of sale. The resolution of the problem is marked by the second *Wiederaufnahme* involving ויקם, in verses 17 and 20. Morphologically, the verbal phrase is identical to verses 3 and 7, but ויקם takes on a legal nuance in verses 17 and 20 in reference to the larger subject,²³ which is the property of Abraham and his family. The literary repetition poignantly frames the completion of the necessary ritual in verse 18. The next verse (v. 19) begins with the statement "and after this" (ואחריו כן), which highlights the time and anticipation of the previous legal dialogue in verses 3–17. Broadly speaking, the phrase "and after this" reveals a consciousness of time that encompasses the liminality of Sarah's marginalized existence, starting with death and including burial.

The Death of Rachel

The death and burial of Rachel in Gen 35:16–19 differs from Sarah's not only because Rachel is buried separately from the family tomb (the Cave of Machpelah) but also because of the way she is identified during her fated end. Genesis 35 actually describes the death and burial of several people: Rachel's nursemaid Deborah (35:8), Rachel herself, and the patriarch Isaac (35:29). But none of these people are buried together, and only Isaac's interment is inside a family tomb.²⁴ Rachel's description also far exceeds the other two accounts in both detail and consequence. Rachel's individual interment sets her apart from the other matriarchs. According to Gen 49:31, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah are buried in the Cave of Machpelah. This separateness in death may seem

23. J. J. Rabinowitz, "The Susa Tablets, the Bible and the Aramaic Papyri," *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961): 61.

24. This is only implied in Gen 35:29, though the death idiom ("gathered to his peoples") is used. Isaac's burial in the family tomb is later mentioned by his son Jacob (Gen 49:31).

like a denial of Rachel's identity. To an extent it is, as the particular circumstances of her death in childbirth distinguished her fate from the others. Yet the terms that describe her burial suggest that her memory was given a prominent place in death. The description of her death also indicates that her identity as matriarch was never denied, despite the perilous nature of her fate.

The exceptional account of Rachel's death and burial (Gen 35:16–21) begins with its setting. The migratory family of Jacob lacks a fixed place on the map aside from their sojourn at Bethel (vv. 1–15). The result is that Rachel is buried in a tomb unassociated with any village, "along the way to Ephrath" (v. 19; see also Gen 48:7). The full title of this burial place, the Pillar of the Sepulcher of Rachel (מצבת קברת רחל), indicates its prominence and suggests that it visibly marked the landscape. The initial word in the construct chain is *מצבת*, which is probably the same type of object that Absalom set up for himself in 2 Sam 18:18.²⁵ As suggested in chapter 3, it is also similar to Phoenician memorializing pillars erected for the dead (*mšbt*; see CIS 1, 58 and Umm al-Amad 10). The second term in the construct chain is the feminine singular noun *קברה* 'sepulcher.' This is the same term used in the funerary inscriptions of Jerusalem's Silwan necropolis (*Silw* 1 and 4). The syntax is also similar to the Silwan inscriptions, as the term is in construct with a proper noun that indicates the monument's ownership. These parallels are significant. The funerary monuments in Silwan were public and prominent features of Jerusalem's topography. Rachel's sepulcher most likely functioned in a similar manner, given that it later served as an important landmark. But her burial place was not overtly tied to inheritance, unlike Joseph's individual burial in Shechem (Josh 24:32).²⁶ An answer to the question of her singular interment must therefore address her status in death along with the nature of her burial.

An important recent study of Rachel's burial has suggested that her death during childbirth rendered her dangerous and resulted in her interment separate from the rest of her family.²⁷ Rachel's identity in death was restricted by the liminality involved in childbirth, a status that entailed purity regulations elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The suggestion is compelling, considering

25. Absalom's pillar, however, was unassociated with his burial in 2 Sam 18:17. Furthermore, according to 2 Sam 18:18 (see also 3Q15 col. 10, 12) the pillar bore the title *יד אבשלום* 'monument of Absalom.'

26. B. D. Cox and S. Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 138–39.

27. Cox and Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," 135–48. I differ only in that I take the tomb to be monumental (to some degree) rather than a cist burial, which they argue for based on ethnographic parallels.

the crucial role that status plays in mortuary practices. But Rachel's state is not entirely marginal, as her name is memorialized in monumental form and remembered in her sepulcher long after her death. Although the complexities of Rachel's status are most apparent in her individual tomb, the description of her death in Gen 35:18 reveals the intricacies of her role as matriarch: "And her soul was departing because she was a dying person [כי מֵתָה], and she called his name 'Ben-oni' [meaning 'son of my sorrow'] but his father called him 'Benjamin.'" Rachel's selfhood (נִפְשׁ) here is defined contextually through her final act as a parent. In her role as mother, Rachel's last act is to name her son. The significance of the name, and the act of naming, should not be overlooked in this passage, even if Jacob renamed his son Benjamin once Rachel was dead. Following this moment of fleeting identity, which involved the birth and naming of her son, Rachel is immediately buried and memorialized (Gen 35:19–20).

The context of Rachel's death fixes her identity as matriarch even if it problematizes her role due to the liminality of childbirth. In this sense, her identity differs from the marginal status endured by Sarah in Gen 23. The issues involved can be explored through the participle form of מוֹתָה, which temporarily marks Sarah's corpse as a marginalized object but is more permanent in describing Rachel's embodied status in death. In Gen 35:18a, the *qal* feminine singular participle מוֹתָה describes Rachel as a dying person.²⁸ She is not marginalized as a מֵתָה like Sarah in Gen 23, which was due to Sarah's delayed burial. But the feminine participle plays a specific role in describing how death distinguishes Rachel as a matriarch. The use of מוֹתָה in Gen 35:18a recalls its occurrence in Gen 30:1 when Rachel states: "but if there are [no children], I am dying" (וְאִם אֵין מֵתָה אֹכֵלִי). In this earlier passage, Rachel complains to Jacob about her infertility and claims that if she does not bear sons she will perish. To die childless implies an unfulfilled fate. Rachel's concerns are eventually met with the births of her sons Joseph and Benjamin, but the latter birth results in her death.

Ultimately, the creation of Rachel's separate burial sets her apart as a matriarch. It created a landmark, and the tradition of her burial continues to exist in the modern landscape of the Middle East, as does the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron.²⁹ In fact, the references in the Hebrew Bible to Rachel's tomb reveal

28. The interpretation of מוֹתָה as a *qal* feminine singular participle rather than the third person feminine singular suffix verb is supported by the Targums (see מוֹתָה in Neofiti) and fits the syntax.

29. For a study of the traditions of Rachel's tomb, biblical and post-biblical, focusing on the modern site of the tomb located outside of Bethlehem, see F. M. Strickert, *Rachel Weeping: Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the Fortress Tomb* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

that there were different traditions regarding the location of her burial site (1 Sam 10:2 and Jer 31:15; see Matt 2:18),³⁰ which probably indicate rival claims of Rachel as ancestor made by different tribal groups (Benjamin and Judah).

Death and Ideologies of Interment at Bethel

The process of identification at work in funerary rituals related directly to ideals of a good death. But identification here does not always involve a simple dichotomy between good death and bad death. A person's fate could be much more complicated. If a good death meant proper burial, was it still a good death if one was buried separately from the family tomb? The story of Rachel's sepulcher provides a positive answer, but the question is quite complicated. The issues involved will be explored further in a peculiar story of death, burial, and the dead that unfolds in 1 Kgs 13 and 2 Kgs 23. Saul Olyan has expertly addressed the complexities of mortuary practices at work in this story. My use of the term "interment ideology" comes from his article.³¹ But I will revisit 1 Kgs 13 here because its exceptional account of burial provides much insight into the role of the tomb in cultural forms of identification.

The story of the man of God from Judah and his actions in Bethel, which begins in 1 Kgs 12:33 and extends through chapter 13, has long challenged interpreters. Most studies of this passage have concentrated on the problem of prophecy or issues related to Israelite religion.³² Instead, I will look at an undercurrent in the extended narrative, which continues in 2 Kgs 23, that relates to the embodiment of the dead—specifically, bones. References to bones bracket the story, beginning with the prophecy against the altar (1 Kgs 13:2) and ending

30. See N. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 407–8; M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel, II: Interpretation of 1 Sam 10:2, Saul at Rachel's Tomb," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 33 (1962): 107–18; Strickert, *Rachel*, 57–70; and Cox and S. Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," 135–36.

31. S. Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 601–16.

32. See, e.g., U. Simon, "1 Kings 13: A Prophetic Sign—Denial and Persistence," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 47 (1976): 81–117 and D. W. van Winkle, "1 Kings XIII: True and False Prophecy," *Vetus Testamentum* 39 (1989): 31–43. I will not enter into questions of the text's date or its role and redaction within the Deuteronomistic History; on this, see S. L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 51–56 and McKenzie, "The Prophetic History and the Redaction of Kings," *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 206–9. For a study of this account within the literary context of Josiah's reform in Kings, see W. B. Barrick, *The King and the Cemeteries: Toward a New Understanding of Josiah's Reform*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 88 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

with the old prophet's tomb (v. 31).³³ The motif of bones plays an important role in the follow-up to the story in 2 Kgs 23:15–20. The imagery is complex. On the one hand bones are instruments of defilement in the destruction of Bethel's altar (1 Kgs 13:2 and 2 Kgs 13:15–18). On the other hand the destruction of these bones relates to wider themes of denying proper burial.³⁴ But the account of Josiah's desecration of the cemetery at Bethel, later in 2 Kgs 23, also demonstrates the power of association in death through collective burial. This important theme is once more described in terms of bones, here gathered together in a communal tomb.

The Man of God from Judah and His Burial in Bethel

The story of the man of God from Judah includes a prophecy that he will be denied burial with his fathers (1 Kgs 13:21–22). A rival prophet in Bethel delivers these words, but only after he deceives his southern counterpart into tarrying in the north, which violated the divine instructions that first sent the Judahite into the Northern Kingdom. This counterprophecy is fulfilled soon after when a lion kills the man of God while he attempts to return home. Throughout this prophecy, the Judahite's body plays a crucial role, starting with the words of the old prophet who states bluntly: “your corpse [נבלתו]³⁵ will not come to the tomb of your fathers [קבר אבותיו]” (v. 22). When a lion kills the man of God, the Judahite's body remains intact and uneaten (vv. 24–25, 28).³⁶ The preservation of the corpse allows the old prophet to rectify a state of affairs that he instigated with his earlier deception.³⁷ The old prophet retrieves the corpse and

33. Some regard the altar episode (1 Kgs 13:1–10) and the story of the prophets (1 Kgs 13:11–32) as separate stories. See, e.g., J. T. Walsh, “The Contexts of 1 Kings XIII,” *Vetus Testamentum* 39 (1989): 355–70.

34. Olyan, “Some Neglected Aspects,” 601–16.

35. The term “corpse” (נבלה), the lifeless body of the man of God, occurs eight times in vv. 24–30.

36. Several commentators have pointed out the miraculous nature of the lion guarding the dead body. Simon, “1 Kings 13,” 96 saw the animal as fulfilling the prophecy of 1 Kgs 13:8–9. For a full treatment of animal imagery in this passage, see K. C. Way, “Animals in the Prophetic World: Literary Reflections on Numbers 22 and 1 Kings 13,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (2009): 47–62.

37. Walsh, “Contexts,” 360 interpreted the roles of the lion, the donkey, and the old prophet in the story of the corpse as a way of using irony to offset the initial acts of deception on the part of the prophet.

transports it back to Bethel.³⁸ There, he properly mourns the dead man and has the Judahite buried in his own tomb in Bethel.³⁹ The description of burial in this story involves the body in different states: as an intact corpse (vv. 28–30) and then later as bones (v. 31). According to the fulfilled prophecy, the man of God meets a tragic and unexpected fate, and he is not buried in his ancestral tomb. He is killed while traveling, and his death means that he is forever separated from kin and patrimony. Yet, despite the fact that the Judahite cannot enjoy an ideal interment, his body's proper treatment by the old prophet ameliorates his fate.⁴⁰ The burial of the man of God in Bethel spares him the postmortem annihilation that comes with the exposure of the corpse. The standard curses found in biblical and Near Eastern sources involves the consumption of the dead by wild animals, birds and beasts alike. But the lion that kills the Judahite miraculously does not destroy the man's body. The intact state of the corpse, along with the lion's indifference, allows the old prophet to retrieve the Judahite's body. The subsequent actions by the old prophet, especially the act of interring the Judahite in the collective setting of his family tomb in Bethel, effectively facilitates the Judahite's postmortem survival.⁴¹ The old prophet's stated desire that

38. Indeed, the corpse is displayed in its abandoned state, where travelers observe it thrown to the roadside and surrounded by animals (v. 25). The old prophet identifies the corpse in this ignominious state and retrieves it for proper burial (v. 26).

39. The verbal root $\sqrt{\text{נח}}$ 'to rest' communicates the proper care of the corpse and, as such, implies certain attitudes toward the body. In a Phoenician inscription, KAI 35:2, the cognate root is used to describe a burial site: *mškb nhty*, 'my restful burial.' The term נחלה is first qualified in vv. 24 and 28 by the possessive suffix: "his corpse." Otherwise, in the description of its abandonment, the reference to the corpse is in the absolute state (v. 24b–25 and 28b). The old prophet identifies the corpse as the man of God (v. 26), and it is not until he removes the corpse from its abandonment that it is referred to as the "corpse of the man of God" (v. 29). The corpse is clearly in jeopardy as it lies along the roadside among the animals, but what is specifically jeopardized is a sense of identity (or selfhood) that relates to the body. The element of selfhood conveyed by the dead body was secure only once the old prophet had rested it upon the donkey for transportation to his own family tomb in Bethel where he could properly bury the Judahite prophet, and lament and mourn the man's death (vv. 29–30). The status of the dead is even implied in the prepositions used to describe the abandoned corpse versus the entombed bones. The corpse, thrown to the roadside, is "beside/with" (אצל) the animals (e.g., v. 24b), while the subsequent burial of the man's bones inside the Bethel tomb places them in a secured location where one day the old prophet's bones will be buried "beside/with" (אצל) them.

40. The act of providing proper burial where it is otherwise lacking is discussed in S. Olyan, "Unnoticed Resonances of Tomb Opening and Transportation of the Remains of the Dead in Ezekiel 37:12–14," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 491–501. The kinsman-redeemer in Job 19:25 may have played a similar role; see M. J. Suriano, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 49–66.

41. To this one could add the man of God's eventual remembrance generations later during the Josianic reform (2 Kgs 23:16–18). The reference to Josiah in 1 Kgs 13:2 is an example of

he be buried with the man of God also emphasizes an ideal of collective burial even when it does not involve a family or clan.

The Desecration of Bethel's Dead in 2 Kings 23

The collective setting of a family tomb serves as an ideal place for bones, and it is this ideal that offers some unity to the story of the altar at Bethel. In 2 Kgs 23:16, several centuries after the prophecy in 1 Kgs 13:2–3, Josiah empties the tombs of Bethel and burns their bones upon Bethel's altar. The primary purpose of the Judahite king's actions here, made evident in the addendum in 2 Kgs 23:19–20, is to defile the sacred space of the northern city's high place.⁴² The violation of Bethel's tombs is ancillary to this purpose. But the fate of the dead at Bethel is an apt contrast to the preservation of the two prophets in 2 Kgs 23:16–18, where mortuary practices and the process of dying underscore the prophetic message. The words of the old prophet convey the purpose of the repository inside the family tomb: “rest [נוח] my bones beside his bones” (1 Kgs 13:31).⁴³ But he goes on to justify this request by stating that the Judahite's prophecy against the north shall be fulfilled in 1 Kgs 13:32. The span of time that encompasses his death and the decomposition of his body eventually culminates in the divine word that was first delivered in 1 Kgs 13:2 by the man of God from Judah. The Bethelite's tomb serves as a symbol of fulfilled prophecy. Just as the physical act of rendering asunder the Bethel altar serves as a “sign” (מופת) of the Judahite's divine message in 1 Kgs 13:3–5, so too is the funerary marker, or “monument” (ציון), on the Bethelite's tomb in 2 Kgs 23:17 a tangible witness of the old prophet's words in 1 Kgs 13:31–32. The old prophet's act of burial, which conveys a strong idea of inclusion, extenuates the identity of the dead man from Judah. Collectively, their bones reside together in the Bethelite tomb. In the end the Judahite's bones “rescue” (מלט) those of the old prophet during Josiah's destructive purge of Bethel in 2 Kgs 23:18b, allowing their remains to rest (נוח) together undisturbed.

prophecy *ex eventu*. The verses at the beginning and end of the chapter, 13:2 and 13:32, provide a literary frame that unites the story of the altar breaking in vv. 3–10. Note also the possible tension that is created with the description of Josiah destroying the altar in 2 Kgs 23:15 and then burning bones upon it in the next verse (v. 16). The old prophet is also described as coming from Samaria in 2 Kgs 23:18b.

42. On of the intricacies of both biblical accounts, see Barrick, *King*, 27–60 and L. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–21.

43. Simon, “1 Kings 13,” 97 recognized the secondary burial motifs in 1 Kgs 13:31.

The collective burial of both individuals ensures their postmortem survival, but it also complicates their identification. On the one hand the Judahite is not reunited with his ancestors. On the other hand the Bethel prophet's survival is due to his inclusion with the Judahite, who is not his kin, although he laments him as "my brother" (1 Kgs 13:30). Consequentially, the narrative account in Kings names neither the man of God from Judah nor the old prophet from Bethel. They are identified instead by the roles they serve, by their place of origin,⁴⁴ and by their presumed age difference. This last point should not be overlooked, as the basic description of the Bethel prophet indicates that he was able to live to a relatively advanced age and that he was survived by his sons. These are the very things that were seemingly denied to the man of God from Judah. The family tomb in Bethel assured that the old prophet would experience a good death, even though the tomb would be threatened several centuries later. Yet this assurance constituted a stable place from which the old prophet could extend care for someone whose death was problematic. The result was postmortem survival, embodied in the care and treatment of bones, yet the circumstances meant the attenuation of their respective identities.

Conclusion

The ideal afterlife in the Hebrew Bible was bound to the tomb and embodied in the dead. The stories of burial in the three cases reviewed in this chapter show how these two aspects work. Death is relational, and the tomb was a critical component in defining relationships and establishing the identity of the dead within these relationships. Of the three accounts, only Rachel's involved individual interment. But the other accounts demonstrate the power of association in death. The family tomb was a key element in the idealization of the afterlife because postmortem survival depended in part upon questions of association. With whom are you buried? Collective interment could either form the ideal, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah's family tomb in the Cave of Machpelah, or a partial fulfillment of this ideal, as in the story of the two prophets at Bethel.

The Pillar of the Sepulcher of Rachel is one of the few biblical examples of assigning ancestral identity to a funerary monument. But it also shows how identity is intricately linked to interment, in this case, of Rachel as matriarch. The tragedy of her death in childbirth set her apart, but her burial was still placed within the tribal inheritance of the son born to her: Benjamin. Conversely, Sarah's interment was the first of several burials at one particular

44. Although the places are not specific and, in fact, confused in some verses; e.g., 2 Kgs 23:18 describes the old prophet as from Samaria.

cave tomb (at Machpelah). Her death and burial thus established precedence and ownership of the burial site. The place of Sarah's burial became a fixed point in the patriarchal narratives, and it was there that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were eventually gathered to their peoples (see Gen 49:29–33). The story of the man of God's burial in Bethel, on the other hand, highlights the importance of burial even if it is not possible in a family tomb. Once more, we see emphasis placed on the survival of bones, here in the odd story of rival prophets from neighboring kingdoms. It also reveals the complicated nature of burial, where interment inside the family tomb constituted the highest ideal. Denial of burial with one's ancestors is seen here as a divine curse, the outcome of the man of God's disobedience, but it is not the same as the denial of burial altogether.⁴⁵ One could say that the man of God in this story ended up being gathered to someone else's peoples. In fact, this becomes a crucial aspect of the story. The old prophet's faithfulness in caring for the Judahite's remains is remembered generations later, sparing his family tomb during Josiah's purge of Bethel.

Care for the dead through proper burial is a critical component in each of these stories. Not only does it ensure their postmortem survival and the preservation of their identity (even in limited form) but also it establishes traditions of the dead that are founded upon a specific place. This place, of course, is the tomb. In these examples, the bounded cemetery is more than an inheritance. It provides a means for identifying the dead, and it serves as a permanent fixture for their memory. The tomb, as the place of the dead, preserves and protects their mortal remains. But it also becomes a location for remembering who the dead were and what they did during their lifetimes. The ideal of the family tomb was one of ancestor veneration. It was not about worshipping ancestors as deities, as Fustel de Coulanges once theorized. It was about memory. In these stories, mortuary practices play key roles in remembering the dead. But these acts were more than just preserving their names—or their prophetic status, as in the case of 2 Kgs 23. Remembering the dead meant establishing narratives around who they were in life and what they did. As ancestors, the dead remain with the living, and their afterlives establish meaningful parameters for life and society. Rachel stands as testament to this phenomenon. Her fate reveals that her status as matriarch was permanently fixed in death. As an ancestral mother, she is later depicted in Jer 31:15 weeping over her children during the Babylonian exile. This moving image reveals that the biblical dead never forgot the beautiful world that gave them being.

45. Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects," 606.

Death, Dying, and the Liminality of Sheol

IN HIS *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis asserted that there was hardly any concept of a “future life” in the Hebrew Bible.¹ Following this dreary, but not uncommon, assessment, he stated: “the word translated ‘soul’ in our version of the Psalms means simply ‘life’; the word translated ‘hell’ means simply ‘the land of the dead,’ the state of all the dead, good and bad alike, *Sheol*.”² He referred to Sheol as a state of being rather than a place, but regarding exactly what Sheol was and how the biblical writers thought of it, he could only say “it is difficult to know.”³ Lewis sought to explain this ambiguity by suggesting that the biblical writers avoided death. According to Lewis, the religion of the biblical writers—specifically, those of the Old Testament—discouraged them from contemplating the overwhelming negativity of death’s realm (Sheol). The answers provided by the famous Christian writer, leaving aside for the moment questions about their accuracy, are difficult. His comments reveal problematic assumptions regarding death in the Old Testament, which I have examined throughout the book so far, as well as the conundrum of Sheol, the topic of this chapter. Yet the two are enmeshed. Sheol remains an enigma in the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible because it defies modern notions of mortality.

Lewis was certainly correct to disassociate Sheol from hell, and his follow-up comment accurately summarized Sheol as an inclusive status: it involved everyone. The latter observation is one of the main problems in the interpretation of Sheol. But Lewis’s comments were not limited to Sheol, and his statement that “soul” stands for “life” in the psalter was imprecise. As discussed in chapter 4, נפש refers to the self. It is not a vitalizing phenomenon.

1. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), 36.

2. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 36.

3. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 36.

The term נפש stands for an embodied sense of self/soul that is revealed through context. The soul (נפש) is usually set against a backdrop of mortal danger in the Psalms, and in these contexts Sheol takes a peculiar form. In the Psalter, Sheol is often a place of abandonment from which the psalmist seeks divine deliverance. As James Barr observed, “in the passages concerning the possible leaving of the person in Sheol, there is a marked use of נפשי ‘my soul,’ and a marked predominance of this over the anthropological expressions that might accompany it or be in parallelism with it.”⁴ Thus, it would seem that the inclusivity of Sheol could extend to the selfhood of the psalmist. This inclusivity is presented as an existential problem, a crisis of the self. But what does this imply about death in the Hebrew Bible? And what is Sheol?

The term “Sheol” occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible and has two general senses: it is used to refer to a mythologized realm of the dead,⁵ or it appears as a type of tomb.⁶ The two senses overlap, but they are important to distinguish when analyzing the poetic imagery associated with Sheol, because they both form contexts of death that surround the psalmist. Tomb imagery is the most predominant and is often suggested by subterranean themes in passages that use the word. For example, Sheol is found in parallel with words for “pit” (e.g., שחת in Ps 16:10 and בור in Ps 30:4), reflecting mortuary practices.⁷ The mortuary sense is conveyed also through descriptions of descending (ירד) into Sheol.⁸ These specific images, along with the natural associations that accompany the place of the dead, have led archaeologists to identify Judahite mortuary practices in general with the idea of Sheol.⁹ But beyond the mention

4. J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 41.

5. E.g., Pss 6:6; 18:5–6 (= 2 Sam 22:6) and 116:3; outside of the Psalms, Job 7:9 and Jonah 2:6. See D. Rudman, “The Use of Water Imagery in Descriptions of Sheol,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113 (2001): 240–44. Sheol can also be personified in the Hebrew Bible, usually in wisdom texts, although this does not necessarily imply that the term is a reflex of some earlier type of chthonic deity such as the Ugaritic god Mot; see B. Becking, “Sheol,” in *DDD*, 768–70.

6. See L. Wächter, “שאר; ש’ול,” *TDOT* 14:239–48, and T. J. Lewis, “Dead, Abode of the,” *ABD* 2:103.

7. Wächter, “שאר; ש’ול,” 243.

8. Wächter, “שאר; ש’ול,” 242–43. This verb can also describe descent into the netherworld.

9. E.g., E. Meyers, “Secondary Burials in Palestine,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 33 (1970): 17 states that “the biblical phrase ‘to be gathered to one’s fathers’ thus means to die and descend to Sheol where the family of all Israel was assembled.” See also G. Barkay, “Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age,” in *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period*, ed. I. Singer (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzak Ben-Zvi and Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 113 (Hebrew).

of various literary motifs that accompany Sheol,¹⁰ the connection between the two is never explained.

Certainly one of the motivating factors in the identification of Sheol as a type of tomb is the notion that everyone eventually goes to both. But attributing entombment to Sheol creates tension with the ideals of death expressed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Sheol is undeniably bleak, and presence in Sheol is expressed in negative terms. On the other hand the family tomb is a cultural ideal that is never described negatively in the Hebrew Bible. Thus it can be asked: if Sheol represents an all-inclusive sense of mortality, is this where Israel's ancestors reside in death? Johannes Pedersen was aware of this problem and tried to reconcile it with his concept of an Ur-grave within which all of the dead were collected.¹¹ But in his Ur-grave suggestion, Pedersen described the tomb as "both good and bad."¹² This ambivalent description merely underscored the challenge of death in the Hebrew Bible for modern interpreters. Regarding Sheol, its negativity together with its inclusiveness led Pedersen to the same problematic conclusion as C. S. Lewis, that the biblical writers denied the reality of death.

The negativity of Sheol is unquestionable, but does this negativity amount to a rejection of death? The available evidence suggests that, in the first millennium BCE, death was not an "enemy of life";¹³ on the contrary, it was an accepted part of human existence. The evidence from Judahite mortuary practices and biblical regulations regarding corpses, taken together, reveals an overarching concern for discretion rather than outright denial. The data gleaned from both text and artifact suggests a concern for maintaining boundaries separating the dead from the living. But this is precisely why Sheol is so paradoxical. Sheol reflects a problem of boundaries. The question is how these boundaries are conceptualized in the Psalms.

In his commentary on Psalms, Hans-Joachim Kraus argued that the experience of the psalmist in Sheol related to problems of injustice and perceived iniquity. The expressed desperation was due in part to the accusations leveled against the psalmist. As Kraus explained, "this reciprocal relation, this complexity of distress causes all clear contours of the experience of specific

10. The conundrum is rarely addressed, although it was occasionally acknowledged in older works; see, e.g., H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 243.

11. J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 2:462.

12. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 2:462.

13. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 2:462.

misfortune to become blurred.”¹⁴ This explanation of the psalmist’s experience in Sheol compares with Roland Murphy’s description of Sheol’s dire setting (again, his “afterdeath”).¹⁵ Murphy acknowledged the funereal nature of Sheol and even questioned whether Sheol began in the tomb. But this only led him to remark that Sheol’s “boundaries are not clearly defined.”¹⁶ The blurred contours and vague boundaries indicate that Sheol is best understood as a liminal concept.

If Sheol conveys the idea of liminality and if dying is transitional then we must reexamine the boundaries of death. What do these boundaries tell us about the definition of death in the Hebrew Bible? James Barr touched upon a similar point. He probed the abstract sense of death in biblical literature, differentiating it from modern notions of biological death. This led him to conclude “that the conceptual boundaries of ‘death’ are serious but differently defined.”¹⁷ In light of these observations, I suggest that the problem of Sheol should be approached as a form of liminality that exists between the living and the dead, as something that marginalizes those it affects and, finally, as a phenomenon that reflects a dynamic nature of death. Each of these avenues can be productively explored in the Psalms.

The Problem of Sheol in the Literary Sources

The term “Sheol” is found throughout the Hebrew Bible, but it is most common in the Psalter where it occurs fifteen times. Sheol appears nine times each in Isaiah and Proverbs. In the former, it is mostly found in First Isaiah (the lone exception is Isa 57:9).¹⁸ There it appears in a mythologizing reference (Isa 5:14), while its description in Isa 14 combines mortuary and nether-world motifs (vv. 9, 11, 15). But it can also serve as a symbol of death (Isa 28:15, 18 in parallel with מוֹת ‘death’) or as an oppressive status (38:10, 18). Sheol is mentioned flatly in Proverbs, where it simply stands for death and destruction

14. H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 77.

15. E. Murphy, “Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature,” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 103.

16. Murphy, “Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature,” 103.

17. Barr, *Garden*, 21–56, esp. 32–34. The quote is from 34. Barr takes his lead from the work of C. Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode in den Individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947).

18. On the death imagery in Isa 56:9–57:13, see T. J. Lewis, “Death Cult Imagery in Isaiah 57,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987): 267–84 and T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 143–58.

without any further description.¹⁹ In the Psalms, however, Sheol has several practical meanings, all related to death. Here Sheol is engaged as both netherworld and tomb, often in reference to suffering and oppression. Sheol typically describes the psalmist's threatened status, implying that it can refer to a state of being. These multiple aspects of Sheol intersect in important ways in the poetry of Psalms. Whether it is mythologized or discussed in the more substantive terms of burial, Sheol serves as both a status and a place affecting the psalmist.

In one of the two possible occurrences of the term "Sheol" outside of the Bible prior to the Hellenistic period, the reference combines all of these aspects. Although the readings are reconstructed, the Deir 'Alla Plaster Text (DAPT), presents Sheol as a realm that imperils the individual, using terms drawn from mythologies of death and from entombment.²⁰ In this eighth-century BCE Aramaic inscription from Transjordan, the figure of Balaam son of Beor offers a prophetic vision that includes a description of the netherworld.²¹ This place is presented as a realm created by the divine actions of El but also as a type of grave. Baruch Levine first proposed reconstructing the term *Sheol* in Combination 2 of the DAPT (lines 14–15) as "the heart of the *corpse* is weak because he goes to [Sheol . . .] to the end of S[heol]."²² The translation here describes the prophet's situation in the netherworld, reconstructing and restoring "Sheol" in lines 14 and 15. In the latter verse, the š before the lacuna indicates the beginning of the word. Levine also interprets the ambiguous

19. In Proverbs, the depiction of Sheol often occurs in synonymous parallel with the "pit" (1:12), "death" (5:5; 7:27), or a place of destruction known as Abaddon (15:11; 27:20). Sheol is otherwise left undescribed, serving as only a symbol within each sapiential phrase.

20. B. Levine, "The Deir 'Alla Plaster Inscriptions," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981): 196–203 first suggested this reading in his important review article of the Deir 'Alla Plaster Text's editio princeps. In the second instance, a fifth-century BCE Aramaic document from Elephantine called "The Story of Bar-Punesh," the protagonist is promised that his "bones will not go down to Sheol." The reference is brief, and its literary context is fragmented. See no. 71 (line 15) in E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923). The source seems to depict an ideal death where Sheol stands as the antithesis. In this sense, the reference to Sheol is similar to its occurrences in Proverbs. The difference here is that presence in Sheol is portrayed in bodily terms: "your bones" (גרמיק). The corporal image is paralleled with "your shade" (סליל), but the B-line of this parallel implies burial: the bones go down to Sheol.

21. For a full translation, see "The Deir 'Allah Plaster Inscriptions: The Book of Balaam, Son of Beor," trans. B. A. Levine (COS 2.27:140–45).

22. The translation follows Levine. The Aramaic is: *lbb. nqr . šhh . ky . 'th . l[šw] . . .] lqšh š[šw] . . .]*. The text here follows the collation found in the editio princeps; see J. Hoftijzer, "Interpretation and Grammar," in *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 174. The edition in KAI 312 only includes Combination 1.

term *nqr* as “corpse,” which is a contested reading.²³ Nonetheless, the setting in Combination 2 is consistent with the various images associated with Sheol in the Hebrew Bible. The spatial sense of lines 14–15 certainly provides a case for reading Sheol in this inscription. What is interesting about this realm is that it combines multiple elements. It is a netherworld that is described in funereal terms. This realm is referred to as a *byt 'lmn* ‘eternal house’ (line 6), a term used elsewhere for tomb (Eccl 12:5; see also Ps 49:12).²⁴ Line 8 mentions the “worm from the grave,” and reference is made to burial benches in lines 10–11. The subject (presumably Balaam) is told: “you will lay down in your eternal bench to perish” (*tškb. mškb. 'lmy. lhlq*).²⁵ But this realm is also depicted in line 7 as a “house” from which people do not ascend. This symbolism can certainly be associated with burial, but here it is cast broadly in order to build an otherworldly image of the afterlife. Moreover, the symbolism is part of the setting for the vision’s protagonist, auguring the death and destruction predicted by the prophet in Combination 1 of the Deir ‘Alla Plaster Text.

The oppression of the individual seen in Balaam’s vision of death can shed some light on the plight of the psalmist, regardless of whether or not Sheol is correctly restored in the fragmentary inscription. But Sheol also appears in other biblical accounts of individual suffering. For example, Jacob repeatedly states that he will go to Sheol if his sons die before his life comes to an end (Gen 37:35; 42:38; and 44:29; see 44:31).²⁶ Another notable example is Jonah’s prayer inside the great fish (Jonah 2:2–11), where he begins in verse 3b by stating he is in the “belly of Sheol” (בֶּטֶן שְׁאוֹל). Sheol in this instance resonates with watery motifs sometimes associated with the netherworld (see vv. 4 and 6), and for obvious reasons. But the point of the motif is Jonah’s personal peril, having been cast into the stormy sea and swallowed whole.

In Isa 38, when Hezekiah offers thanksgiving for his recovery from a life-threatening illness, he brackets his prayer with references to Sheol. At the beginning of this personal response, Hezekiah reveals his initial thoughts: “In

23. See J. A. Hackett, “Response to Baruch Levine and André Lemaire,” in *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Re-evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21–24 August 1989*, ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 73–84. See also the defense in the same volume by B. Levine, “The Plaster Inscriptions from Deir ‘Alla: General Interpretation,” 58–72.

24. Levine, “Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 202–3.

25. Levine, “Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 202–3.

26. In Gen 37:35, Jacob is referring to the (misleading) report that Joseph has died, and in Gen 42:38 and 44:29 he is referring to the potential death of his youngest son, Benjamin.

the rest of my days I must go about in the gates of Sheol, attending to my remaining years" (Isa 38:10). The threshold of death and its effects upon the living are evoked through complex imagery in Isa 38:10. This threshold is rendered both spatially and temporally. The most obvious motif is that of Sheol as a place, a destination that is entered through gates. But the verse also begins and ends with references to time, and this temporality is tied specifically to Hezekiah's life.²⁷ Hezekiah's prayer, like each of the other texts, exemplifies how Sheol can refer to a state of being experienced during moments of distress and turmoil. Hezekiah's words in Isa 38:18, "for Sheol will not praise you," follow his thankfulness for divine deliverance in the previous verse. These two verses, Isa 38:17–18, imply that the king's poor condition—sick and dying—marginalized him from participating in the cultic worship of Yahweh. Hezekiah could not praise his deity while he was in Sheol. The spatial sense in these verses is one of separation, and this separation is tied to the king's state of being.

Sheol in the Psalms

The role of Sheol in accounts of personal distress reviewed so far suggest a way of reading this enigma in the Psalms. Although space does not allow a comprehensive survey of every nuance of the term in the Psalter, a review of four psalms (Pss 16, 49, 88, 116) will offer insight into the status implications of Sheol in relation to the self. In this selection of Psalms, Sheol is often associated with funerary imagery, but its portrayal varies depending on the outlook of the psalmist. Sheol can be evoked as part of the psalmist's hope for salvation or serve as the background of his distress.

Psalm 16

Psalm 16 has played a role in discussions of resurrection (see Acts 2:31) because the psalmist says in verse 10 that he will not be abandoned in Sheol.²⁸ The association of Sheol with death is enforced by the parallelism of Sheol and pit in verse 10. The implication is deliverance from death, but the question is whether deliverance here suggests a belief in resurrection or immortality.

27. Note also the use of פקד 'attend to', here *pual*, in v. 10b.

28. See Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 239–41. For a reassessment of the complications involved in Acts 2:31, and in reading this psalm, see E. Mroczek, "'David Did Not Ascend into the Heavens' (Acts 2:34): Early Jewish Ascent Traditions and the Myth of Exegesis in the New Testament," *Judaïsme ancien* 3 (2015): 219–52.

Both interpretations constitute at least a response to the problem of mortality, if not a forthright resolution. Yet the concepts of either resurrection (as understood in the New Testament and rabbinic literature),²⁹ or immortality (as a form of deathless existence) are not immanently clear in this psalm.³⁰ Indeed, the first concept—resurrection—is entirely absent, while the second is dependent upon assumptions of what immortality means.³¹ But if one resists such readings, how does one interpret Ps 16?

Kraus's rejected both these interpretations of Ps 16 and posed a third: "the problem of death is not solved in the [Hebrew Bible], and yet it is clear in which direction the assertions of trust point: man is destined for life."³² This third way interprets Sheol as a tacit form of annihilation. In this view of death as a mysterious void, the psalmist is able to conceive of the hereafter only as a form of nonexistence that stands in contrast to life. Whereas death was left vague, Kraus understood life as existence with Yahweh. Deliverance from danger, and hence death, affords the psalmist the possibility to worship Yahweh.³³ This third interpretation is also problematic, not only because it rests upon an existential dichotomy but also because it implies a rejection of death as something that was an unresolvable problem (until one arrives at the New Testament). Moreover, Kraus's focus on cultic worship in Ps 16 as symbolic of life caused him to overlook crucial images that are drawn from the realm of death.

In order to understand the death imagery in this psalm, it is important to question the role of Sheol. What does it mean to be abandoned in Sheol? Furthermore, if the psalmist can speak of deliverance from the pit, what does

29. J. D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 23–33.

30. See, e.g., the comments on Ps 16:10–11 in M. J. Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, Anchor Bible 16 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 90–91. The classic critique of Dahood's efforts to read immortality into the Psalter is B. Vawter, "Intimations of Immortality and the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 158–71. Note in particular the discussion of scholarship regarding resurrection and immortality in Ps 16 in Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 239–40. He rejected these possibilities, quoting Barth, *Die Errettung*, 154 in support. Kraus traces the "rescue from danger" interpretation back to W. Nowack and B. Duhm.

31. Vawter, "Intimations," 168–71 and Barr, *Garden*, 32–33, 41–42.

32. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 240.

33. H. Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. J. D. Nogalski, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 121 (original German publication 1933) identified the psalm's literary form as a psalm of confidence, a byproduct of the individual complaint psalm. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 233–35 labeled this psalm "The Fortunate Fate in the Face of Death."

death mean in this psalm? The idea of death as nonexistence, properly qualified, can shed some light on Ps 16, but an outright interpretation of annihilation is unacceptable. The death imagery in this psalm is found on both sides of the psalmist's rhetoric. It features prominently in the psalmist's confident rejection of certain practices, yet it is also evident in what the poet embraces. Rather than a pairing of life and death, one solution is to see these competing images as reflective of a good death (versus a bad death) embodied in the first person voice of the psalmist. It is therefore necessary to look at the text in order to gain a better understanding of what Sheol represents in this particular psalm.³⁴

- 2). I said to Yahweh, "You are my Lord, *and* my goodness; *there is* not one above you!" 3). To the holy ones in the land, they and the nobles of all who delight in them, 4). O their sorrows will increase, *as* they have acquired others. *But* I will not pour out their libations from blood, nor will I lift up their names upon my lips.
- 5). Yahweh is the portion of my plot. And you are my cup—you take hold of my lot. 6). The cords have taken hold of me in pleasant places. Indeed, a beautiful inheritance³⁵ is upon me.
- 7). I will praise Yahweh, my counselor. Indeed, my kidneys are strengthened in the nightly hours. 8). Place me before you, always, O Yahweh, for my right hand shall not teeter. 9). Thus my heart is happy and my glory rejoices, indeed my flesh dwells in security.
- 10). Because you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, neither will you allow your faithful one to see the pit. 11). You have made known to me the path of life. Your presence is sated with happiness; pleasantness is in your right hand forever.

34. Psalm 16 contains several difficulties; see Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 234 and A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 172–73. It is unclear to me whether or not these should be attributed to textual corruptions because these difficulties could also be due to our inability to understand the cultural allusions in this psalm.

35. BHS suggests נחלה 'my inheritance' in light of the LXX ἀπονομία μου; this reading is evident in the translation "my heritage" by Weiser, *Psalms*, 171. The MT, however, probably reflects an archaic n- ending, which would not require emendation; see P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 14/1 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblio, 1991), § 89 n.

The translation here organizes the psalm's poetry into five strophes.³⁶ Within this organization, the overarching theme of Ps 16 can be recognized in the alternation that occurs in the second and third strophes (vv. 2–4 and vv. 5–6). Here the psalmist compares his devotion to Yahweh (Ps 16:5–6) with other practices (Ps 16:3–4). The psalmist does not elaborate on the exact nature of the actions mentioned in the second strophe. Yet the appearance of a few key terms, along with other references, suggests that they are related to the dead. The contrast in these two strophes sets up a pattern for the rest of the psalm.

Although the pattern of good and bad is recognizable in the second and third strophes, the interpretive crux of this psalm is located at the end of the second strophe (vv. 3–4). The meaning of Ps 16:4a continues to defy explanation. Yet the second part of this verse (v. 4b) describes activities that can apply to the care for the dead: their feeding and remembrance. To be sure, the activities are things from which the psalmist abstains. The problem is that the performance of these actions is directed at the enigmatic figures in Ps 16:3, beginning with the “sacred ones” (קדושים). The enigmatic group is described as “those who are in the land,” and the reference here to ארץ is most likely the realm of the dead.³⁷ Yet this does not mean that the קדושים were deified ancestors, worshiped as part of a cult of the dead.³⁸ One must keep in mind that venerating the dead often meant remembering the sacred covenants that were forged in their names, the bones of Joseph being a classic example.

36. I follow K. Liess, in dividing the psalm into five strophes: v.1, vv. 2–4, vv. 5–6, vv. 7–9, vv. 10–11. *Der Weg des Lebens: Psalm 16 und das Lebens- und Todesverständnis der Individualpsalmen*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 77–100. Weiser, *Psalms*, 173–78, however, divided the psalm into three strophes: vv. 1–4, 5–8, and 9–11. Liess's divisions makes sense of the themes that shift around cultural practices in vv. 2–4 and vv. 5–6.

37. See, e.g., Exod 15:12 and N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament*, *Bibliotheca et Orientalia* 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 23–46. For this specific reading of Ps 16:3, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series* 7; *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 123 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 123–24. The netherworld nuance also occurs in Akkadian; see CAD E IV, *eršetū*, 310–11.

38. This interpretation apparently goes back to K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 219 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 334–37. See also K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel*, *Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 210, who interprets קדושים as the dead in the netherworld “in their preternatural state,” and M. Smith, “The Invocation of Deceased Ancestors in Psalm 49:12c,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 107. Yet the term can be interpreted

Pouring out libations is paired with the invocation of names in Ps 16:4b. Broadly speaking, pouring out water for the dead was a prominent feature of early Mesopotamian culture.³⁹ References to pouring wine on graves are also found in versions of Tobit and Ahiqar.⁴⁰ The reference in Ps 16:4b, however, is made difficult by the addition of “from blood” (מדם).⁴¹ The ambiguous wording suggests that blood—or something that symbolizes blood, such as wine—is the substance of the libation.⁴²

in different ways that remain consistent with a netherworld setting. The “sacred ones” here may represent sacred individuals (priests, prophets, etc.) now dead, collectively forming an ancestral group. Less likely is the possibility that “their holy ones” (residing in the netherworld) refers to chthonic deities such as those found in Mesopotamian sources. One could argue the same for deified ancestors, representing foreign culture (or, at least, the culture of those the psalmist contrasts himself with). But the fact of the matter is that there is no solid evidence for ancestor worship elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Weiser, *Psalms*, 171 follows the LXX and translates Ps 16:3a as “The Lord deals gloriously with the saints in the land.” Yet he cites Mowkinckel in a footnote (174 n. 1) when he suggests that the קדושים in Ps 16:3a may indicate foreign gods (referred to as אחר in v. 4). The alternative is to read the “holy ones of the land” as cultic personnel who serve as counterparts to Yahweh in heaven (see Kraus, *Psalms* 1–59, 236–37), but this is less compelling.

39. The most notable example of such libation is the Sumerian KI.A.NAĜ ‘place of pouring water’, which is mentioned in the context of venerating the dead; see A. C. Cohen, *Death Rituals, Ideology, and the Development of Early Mesopotamian Kingship: Toward a New Understanding of Iraq’s Royal Cemetery of Ur* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 104–16. Note also the Akkadian references to pouring out water for the dead, *naq mē*; see the references in CAD N/1 XI, *naqû*, 337.

40. The New Jerusalem Bible translates Tob 4:17, “Be generous with bread and wine on the graves of upright people . . .” In later versions of Ahiqar, this saying is rendered “pour your wine on the graves of the righteous.” See “Ahiqar,” trans. J. M. Lindenberg (OTP 2:489–90), and J. C. Greenfield, “Two Proverbs of Ahiqar,” in *‘Al Kanfei Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology*, ed. S. M. Paul, M. E. Stone, and A. Pinnick (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 317–19.

41. Although the prepositional phrase describes the drink offering, it should not be rendered as a construct with the adjacent verb (נסך), “blood libations.” For instance, Weiser, *Psalms*, 171 has “libations of blood,” which is a more precise rendering even if it does not offer clarity on the meaning of the phrase. Similarly, modern translations often indicate an adjectival reading such as “bloody libations” (JPS), or “drink offerings of blood” (NRSV). The latter is consistent with the suggestion found in Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 336. M. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 57 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 60 n. 103 draws from Spronk and suggests that the use of blood in this passage may be polemical. Lewis, *Cults*, 166 sees Spronk’s suggestion as plausible but notes that there are no attested “blood libations” for the dead in ancient Near Eastern sources.

42. Wine vessels become prominent features of grave goods during the Iron II period; see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 74–79. Within the context of mourning the dead, note the reference to the “cup of consolation” (כוס תנחומים) in Jer 16:7, which is mentioned in parallel with food brought to the bereaved.

Verses 5–6 then present imagery that begins and ends with references to inheritance.⁴³ The psalmist starts by referencing that which belongs to him (מִנָּה חֶלְקִי), claiming specifically that Yahweh is his portion. The reference then recurs in Ps 16:6, describing the psalmist's inheritance as “beautiful” (אֶף נִחֻלַּת שְׁפָרָה עָלַי). But the poetry is much more elaborate, as it is built upon themes of inheritance (A), provision (B), and fate (C), in an A B C // C' B' A' pattern. The second element (B) is more ambiguous than the other two—“you [Yahweh] are my cup” // “in pleasantness”—but it provides a cohesive image that contributes to the psalm's structure. The cup recalls the libations in verse 4b, but here the psalmist's words imply Yahweh as the libation. In Ps 16:6a (B'), the substantive adjective (נְעִימִים) is less clear, but it recurs as נְעִימָה at the end of the psalm (v. 11b). In the last verse, the term describes the positive nature of God's presence.⁴⁴ The initial occurrence of this term in 16:6a, “pleasant places,” is brought about through the divine provision of 16:5b, Yahweh as “my cup.”

The repetition of נְעִימִים requires further explanation. In Ps 16:6a, the term נְעִימִים is translated “pleasant places,” anticipating the “beautiful inheritance” in the next clause (v. 6b). The imagery of the psalmist's state of being is developed in Ps 16:5–6; its development is apparent in the movement from one place to the next in verse 6b. The exact meaning of נְעִימִים in this psalm is obscure, and the term has a general sense of “pleasantness” elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ps 133:1). The term in Ugaritic, *n'm*, also appears in a passage associating it with death. It is found in a description of the netherworld from the Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle (KTU 1.5, VI, 6–7).⁴⁵ In this source, the place where Ba'al's dead body is discovered is called “pleasant steppe-land” (*n'my. ārṣ. dbr*).⁴⁶ Although this specific area forms part of the netherworld (*ārṣ*; see

43. Weiser, *Psalms*, 175.

44. Liess, *Der Weg*, 170–81 favors a cultic reading of Ps 16 over a reading that involves ancestor veneration, and points to the similar terms found in Deuteronomistic literature dealing with the land.

45. The association of *n'm* with the dead is not limited to Ugaritic and classical Hebrew. The word appears in an Aramaic stele from Ördekburnu that memorializes a member of Sam'al's royalty; see A. Lemaire and B. Sass, “The Mortuary Stele with Sam'alian Inscription from Ördekburnu near Zincirli,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 369 (2013): 120, 122 and “Sam'alian Funerary Stele: Ördekburnu,” trans. A. Lemaire (*COS* 4.24:96–97). Although the inscription is fragmented and difficult to read, the word appears in line 6 in a part of the text that refers to divine blessings. The specific details are elusive, due to the stele's damaged state, but as in the similar Katumuwa Stele, the intention of the writing was to establish a place for the dead, specifically for their memory. In each of these texts, *n'm*/נְעִימִים describes the proper place of the dead.

46. The full text is: *n'my. ārṣ. dbr // ysmṯ. šd. šhlmmṯ*, “The pleasant steppe-land; the beautiful field of death's realm”; see also KTU 1.6, II, 19–20.

אֶרֶץ in Ps 16:3), it is a borderland separating the living from the dead. Here the mythopoetic language of the Ba'al Cycle describes liminal space,⁴⁷ the area within which the storm god's corpse was recovered.⁴⁸ This observation is consistent with the boundaries of the two realms, those of the living and those of the dead, as described elsewhere in the Ba'al Cycle.⁴⁹

The concept of place underscores much of the imagery in Ps 16, but this spatial concept is centered upon the psalmist's experience. The statements of Ps 16:5–6 divide the poem into two parts, separating the things from which the psalmist will abstain (e.g., "their libations" in v. 4) from his positive experience under Yahweh's protection. In Ps 16:7–9, the psalmist's condition is expressed through bodily imagery. The psalmist's "kidneys" are strong (v. 7), his "right hand" unfaltering (v. 8). His "heart" is pleased while his "flesh" remains assured (v. 9). Indeed, the reference to "glory" (כבוד) in this verse (Ps 16:9) may be a poetic allusion to "liver" (כבד). The poem reaches its climax in Ps 16:10–11, when the psalmist proclaims that his "soul" will not be forsaken in Sheol. The place of abandonment in this verse is the realm of the dead, presented through the synonymous parallel of "Sheol" and the "pit." The psalmist's existence is secured because Yahweh will not abandon those who are faithful. In these two verses (vv. 10–11), it also becomes possible to view the contrast in space developed in the rest of the psalm. The positive status of the psalmist in Ps 16:7–9 is contrasted with the aspects of death that are collectively rejected in verses 3–4: the netherworld, mortuary practices, venerating the dead, and so on. This distinction is repeated in Ps 16:10–11, with the juxtaposition of "Sheol" // "pit" with the "path of life" // "pleasantness." Moreover, the latter pairing is divinely protected.

Recognizing that concepts of bad space versus good space are operative in this text offers insight into the symbolism involved in Ps 16:6, which begins with the statement: "The cords have taken hold of me in pleasant places." The image here is of the psalmist being ensnared, yet the image of ensnarement is conveyed positively through the term נַעֲמִים. This image is distinct from other occurrences in the Psalms where the image of entrapment by "cords" (חבלים) is an unambiguous reference to death. Examples can be found in Ps

47. N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and His Colleagues*, Biblical Seminar (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 126. See the commentary in M. S. Smith and W. T. Pitard, *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–1.4*, vol. 2 of *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 710–11 and "The Ba'lu Myth," trans. D. Pardee (*COS* 1.86:267 n. 234).

48. M. Suriano, "Ruin Hills at the Threshold of the Netherworld: The Tell in the Conceptual Landscape of the Ba'al Cycle and Ancient Near Eastern Mythology," *Die Welt des Orients* 42 (2012): 226–28.

49. Suriano, "Ruin Hills," 210–30.

116:3, which will be discussed at length below, and Ps 18:5–6,⁵⁰ where the term appears twice:

- 5). I am encompassed by the cords of death; the torrents of Belial terrify me.
- 6). The cords of Sheol surround me, before me are the snares of death.

In Psalm 16, the cords of death do not entrap the speaker; the inevitability of fate instead falls upon the psalmist in a pleasant place (v. 6a). In Ps 16:8b–10, the psalmist's positive outlook is embodied, leading to the deliverance of his "soul" from Sheol (v. 10). The term for "soul" here serves as a reflexive pronoun (נפשי). But it is possible to recognize how the self is constructed in the context of the psalmist's words of self-expression in verses 8b–9, building up to this statement in verse 10. The self (נפש) is the totality of the psalmist's existence, from his kidneys (כליותי, v. 7b) to his heart (לב, v. 9a), from his right hand (ימין, v. 8b) to his flesh (בשר, v. 9b).

If one follows the theme of death throughout Ps 16, one can observe that there is a distinction between the rejection of death rituals in 16:3–4 and deliverance from death in 16:10. The practices rejected in the second strophe (16:2–4) are contrasted with psalmist's self-assurance in the third strophe (vv. 5–6), where assurance is expressed in terms that relate to fate and inheritance. The fifth and final strophe builds on this foundation in asserting that the psalmist, like all those faithful to Yahweh, will not suffer a bad death (Sheol // pit). If Ps 16:3–4 refers to ancestor veneration, its rejection is what ultimately leads to the positive fate described in the rest of the psalm. These practices are rejected, but they are not rebuked beyond the oblique statement in 16:4a regarding the increase of sorrow. The lack of any strong rebuke raises the question of why these practices are rejected.

It has been suggested that Ps 16 was written from a Levitical perspective in part because of the (presumed) cultic language it uses, as well as the word pairing of חלק 'portion' and נחלה 'inheritance' in Ps 16:5–6.⁵¹ Although this word pair is not unusual in biblical literature (e.g., 1 Kgs 12:16), Kraus pointed to Deut 10:9 and Josh 13:14, where the God of Israel declares himself to be the

50. The parallel text found in 2 Sam 22:5a contains slightly different wording: כי אפפני משברי מות. In this passage water imagery is associated with the overwhelming presence of death through the synonymous parallel of "breakers" (v. 5a) // "torrents" (v. 5b). In Ps 18:5–6, the poetry is built upon the repetition of "cords" at the beginning of each verse.

51. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 238.

“portion” and “inheritance” of the Levites.⁵² The terminology is in fact much more elaborate, as it draws from the motif of inheritance in order to convey the bond between the petitioner and Yahweh.⁵³ But in light of this Levitical reading, it is interesting to compare Ps 16 with Lev 21:1–6 because both texts refer to the social dimensions of death. The multiple points of comparison begin with the fact that in both texts rituals concerning the dead are limited but not necessarily banned outright. Just as the priest’s ability to endure corpse contamination is limited in Lev 21:1–6, the petitioner in Ps 16:2–4 refrains from actions related to rituals directed toward the dead. Both texts are concerned with the self in death, inasmuch as the psalmist rejoices in the deliverance of his soul/self (נפש) from Sheol. In Lev 21:1–3, this concept (נפש) is defined through specific social categories that do not appear in Ps 16. Nor is the psalmist’s נפש described in terms of an impure corpse. Still, the psalmist’s personhood is defined through corporal terms that are used in the verses leading up to the declaration that Yahweh “will not abandon my soul to Sheol.” The materiality of the soul, which underscores purity concerns in Lev 21:1–3, is expressed in Ps 16:10 as physical escape.⁵⁴

Another point of comparison is found in the ambiguous term “sacred ones” (קדושים) in Ps 16:3. In Lev 21, the reason given for containing situations of corpse contamination is that the priests were to be “sacred ones” (קדושים) for the God of Israel. Due to the unique circumstances of Levitical patrimony, the ability of the priests to engage in mortuary practices needed to be tightly controlled (see chapter 4). In Ps 16:3–6, it is possible to recognize a similar intersection of ancestor veneration and divine heritage. It is therefore possible that the point of Ps 16:3–4 was to avoid excessive rituals on behalf of the dead, regardless of whether or not the psalm is particularly Levitical. The veneration of too many ancestors could lead to the neglect of proper veneration of Yahweh.

Sheol in Ps 16 thus represents the opposite of a good death. The reference to embodied selfhood that leads up to the mention of Sheol indicates that it was a place of personal peril. Furthermore, the term’s synonymous parallel with “pit” (שוח) clearly associates the image in Ps 16:10 with that of a bad death. This term can have different applications, but all fall within the

52. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 238.

53. See the extended analysis in Liess, *Der Weg*, 170–81.

54. The physicality invoked throughout this psalm led Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 240 to interpret it as “rescue from an acute mortal danger.” See, in particular, Kraus’s quote of Franz Delitzsch: “physical freedom from death is only the external aspect of that which [the psalmist] hopes for in his own case.”

semantic ranges of death. Its nuances can be spatial,⁵⁵ yet it can also represent destruction (Isa 38:17). Indeed, Nicholas Tromp, commenting on the tomb-like nuances of שֹׁחַל 'pit' in Job 17:14,⁵⁶ says: "here the frontiers between grave and nether world cannot be drawn." There is a liminal sense to this term that also applies to Sheol. Deliverance from its perilous margins is the psalmist's reward in Ps 16 for being faithful to Yahweh.

Psalm 49

Sheol appears three times within Psalm 49's intricate image of death (vv. 15–16). This imagery combines mortuary themes and motifs from the mythology of death, together with a contemplation of mortality that is more common in wisdom literature. The result is an ambiguous picture of death and the dead that begins in Ps 49:8.⁵⁷

- 8). Surely a brother cannot redeem someone, nor give to God his ransom. ^{9).} But precious is the ransom of their soul, for it will cease forever. ^{10).} Yet he lives on for eternity and will not see the pit.
- 11). For one sees that the wise will die together *with* the fool and the stupid. They will perish and leave to those after them their wealth. ^{12).} Their tombs⁵⁸ are their houses forever, their dwelling places for generations and generations—They evoke their names upon the earth.
- 13). And humanity, in preciousness, will not abide; it is like the animals that perish.

55. E.g., it can represent a place into which one descends (Ps 30:10; Job 33:24) or "passes through" (Job 33:28). In Ps 30, it compares with בֹּרַח in this sense (Ps 30:4b; 30:10). For a thorough discussion of the term, see Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, 69–71.

56. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, 70.

57. The textual and philological issues are covered in the commentaries; see Kraus, *Psalms* 1–59, 478–85; Weiser, *Psalms*, 384–91; and the detailed treatment in S. Gulde, *Der Tod als Herrscher in Ugarit und Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/22 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 181–215. These studies typically employ redaction criticism in an effort to distinguish which verses are later insertions. This is sometimes done according to the interpreter's understanding of the poetic meter of the psalm. The redaction historical approaches are built as much on the psalm's theme and style as they are on the presumed history of death as a concept in biblical literature, often resulting in reconstructions that are unconvincing. My treatment of Ps 49, as is the case for Ps 16, will take the text as it stands and engage in minimal reconstruction (see the next footnote).

58. The MT reads "their inwards" (קִרְבָּנִים), which does not make much sense here. It is better to follow the Greek versions: Ps 48:12 (LXX) reads καὶ οἱ τάφοι αὐτῶν, "and their tombs,"

- 14). This is their way, their folly. And after them, according to their own mouths they are approved. *selāh* 15). Like a flock to Sheol they are set, Death shepherds them. But the upright will rule them in the morning, and their image wastes [in] Sheol apart from his abode.
- 16). O how God will redeem my soul from the hand of Sheol, for he will take me. *selāh* 17). Do not fear when a man becomes wealthy, when he increases the glory of his house.
- 18). Because, in his death, he will not take everything, and his glory will not go down after him. 19). Thus he blesses his soul in his lifetime, and praises you: “Because you have made good for yourself.” 20). It [the soul] will go to the generation of his fathers, everlasting, but not see light.
- 21). And humanity, in preciousness, will not understand; it is like the animals that perish.

At the core of this psalm is the recognition that all life perishes. The three occurrences of יקר ‘precious’ in 49:9, 13, 21 convey this idea throughout the structure of the psalm,⁵⁹ establishing it through the repetition (with slight variation) of the latter two verses. This sense of mortality is anticipated by Ps 49:11, which focuses on the fact that everyone—both wise and fool—dies, a topic well known from wisdom literature.⁶⁰ The motifs are offered in a particular manner, and the imagery in Ps 49:8–21 is presented at times in contradictory terms. The psalmist’s thoughts unfold through a series of observations,

which indicates a metathesis of the second and third letters in the Hebrew (קרבס). Most scholars follow this reading; see Kraus, *Psalms* 1–59, 479; Weiser, *Psalms*, 384–85 (who cites BHS); and Gulde, *Der Tod*, 183 n. 280.

59. Gulde, *Der Tod*, 184 n. 282 sees in this term an aspect of materiality that relates to the problem of wealth and death. As such, its nuance (“respect” or “reputation”) compares with “glory” in 49:17–18. See the study of this term in Ps 116:15 in J. A. Emerton, “How Does the LORD Regard the Death of His Saints in Psalm cxvi. 15? יקר בעיני יהוה המותה לחסידיו,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983): 146–56. The psalm is discussed in this chapter, and the explanation of יקר in Ps 116 is offered at the end of this section.

60. For instance, see Eccl 2:16. These motifs prompted M. Witte, “‘Aber Gott wird meine Seele erlösen’: Tod und Leben nach Psalm XLIX,” *Vetus Testamentum* 50 (2000): 540–60 to argue that the psalm dated to the second half of the third century BCE. Witte supported this argument by suggesting that the death motifs in Ps 49 portray a body-soul dichotomy and hence Hellenistic influence, although this is eisegetical. Similarly, the discussion of the common lot of humanity cannot be specifically assigned to a historical period. Witte’s late date is thus unconvincing.

and Ps 49:11 and 17–20 are presented almost like object lessons. The recurring themes are life's limits in light of death's inevitability. Within this lesson Sheol plays an important role.

Set against Ps 49's discussion of mortality is a theme of redemption (vv. 8–9 and v. 16). Exactly what redemption means here is uncertain,⁶¹ but the concept is used as a foil for death (and Sheol) throughout the psalm. In fact, the main theological point of Ps 49 is found in the idea of redemption from Sheol. There is nothing anyone can do to escape death except trust in the deity. In Ps 49:8 the ability of a person to redeem another is questioned. This questioning is followed by the statement that selfhood is precarious (יקר). In other words, existence is complicated. The imagery that follows in this psalm indicates that the redemption discussed in Ps 49:8–9 is from death, and the psalm's point begins to emerge when it is set against the background of mortuary practices and ancestor veneration.

The psalmist's use of funerary imagery—in this case, care for the dead—is evident in Ps 49:12, which follows the statement regarding the common fate of all humanity. Everyone dies, and they all dwell in the tomb. But this imagery is pushed further, beyond the equation of house and tomb (Ps 49:12a),⁶² as the dwelling place is described as transgenerational (v. 12a). Moreover, the transgenerational imagery (לדר דור) is followed immediately with an unambiguous reference to ancestor veneration (v. 12b). The practice of evoking names here applies specifically to the dead mentioned in Ps 49:11–12a.⁶³ This imagery compares with the practices referenced in Ps 16:4, where the psalmist says that he will not evoke (“lift up”) the names of the dead. In Ps 49:12b, evocation of the dead forms part of the psalmist's tacit admission of an expected fate. Postmortem existence is assured through a host of activities that accompany funerary rites and remembrance. The question becomes whether or not these practices are comparable with the redemption referred to in Ps 49:8–9. The answer to this question is found in Ps 49:19–20, in the second reference to venerating the dead. Although

61. To quote Barr, *Garden*, 32–33: “now these utterances are not doctrinal statements that might define the nature of the ‘afterlife’; they are doxological terms of praise and worship, and do not explain *how* the ‘soul’ is to be kept away from Sheol or what God actually does when he comes to be present in Sheol.” Barr is certainly correct in showing that the God of Israel had power over Sheol, according to the biblical writers. I would add only that Sheol is a marginalized state that the psalmist passes through rather than a place avoided.

62. The phrase קברם בחימו לעולם (correcting the first word) is an allusion to the term for the grave found in Qoheleth (Eccl 12:5) and Northwest Semitic inscriptions such as Deir ‘Alla (DAPT Combination 2, line 6): בית עולם. See Smith, “Invocation,” 106.

63. Smith, “Invocation,” 105–107.

this reference is more ambiguous, the verses contain important clues, beginning with the word נפש. The verse starts by describing a person blessing his own soul during his lifetime (בחייו). Here, the term נפש is not necessarily pronominal. The verbal clause does not describe speaking to oneself. Instead the soul is the direct object of the subject's action. Outside of this verse, the other references to blessing a soul in Psalms occur in divine invocations (Pss 103:1–2, 22; 104:1, 35). The desire in these passages is for God to bless the psalmist's soul.

The situation in Ps 49:19 is different. The subject—here, the wealthy person—does not receive a blessing. Instead his blessing is for himself, during “his lifetime.” This same clause occurs in 2 Sam 18:18, where it describes Absalom setting up a memorializing pillar to commemorate his name while he was alive. Absalom's actions circumvent patrilineal succession, which is made clear in his own words: “I have no son to remember my name.” The same sense is evoked in Ps 49, as the actions of the wealthy defy not only death but also the traditional means of remembering the dead. Another example is the Katumuwa Stele, where the royal servant states that he set up his stele (for his *nbš* ‘soul’) during his lifetime.⁶⁴ These parallels to Ps 49:19 raise questions regarding the nature of נפש at the beginning of the verse.⁶⁵ Facing mortality, the actions of the wealthy person are ostentatious.

Outside of the Psalms, the combination of the terms “blessing” and נפש appears several times in Gen 27, though the arrangement of the subject and verb differs significantly. Here Jacob tricks Isaac into giving him his brother Esau's birthright, and Isaac's initial words to Esau are particularly revealing. After stating that he is old and does not know the day of his death, Isaac orders his eldest son to hunt game to provide food for him, saying: “And make for me a savory meal that I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, in order that my soul may bless you before I die” (Gen 27:2). Isaac's words state literally that the benediction comes from his “self” (נפש). In this sense, Isaac's selfhood encompasses all of the blessings that he received in his lifetime, along with those that he inherited from his father. The embodied sense is even conveyed through Jacob's deception, as he later impersonates his hirsute older sibling in order to gain Esau's birthright. Isaac, whose vision has dimmed with age,

64. H. Niehr, “Two Stelae Mentioning Mortuary Offerings from Ugarit (KTU 6.13 and 6.14),” in *(Re-)constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East*, ed. P. Pfälzner, H. Niehr, and E. Pernicka, Qatna Studien Supplementa (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 155.

65. Speaking—i.e., the specific blessing and invocation of the dead—is a critical element in texts that describe remembering the dead (or self-commemoration, as in the case of Absalom and Katumuwa). Speaking is also a recurring motif in Ps 49; see vv. 12 and 14, as well as the obscure quote in v. 12.

offers the blessing only after touching Jacob's hands and mistaking him for his other son (Gen 27:21–23). The contrast between Isaac's blessing and Ps 49:19 is that the wealthy person blesses his own soul rather than receiving the blessing from the נפש of his father.

The act of blessing in the story of Jacob's deception is transgenerational: it passes from father to son. So, too, is the imagery in Ps 49:19–20, even though the actions described at the beginning of verse 19 run against this grain. After describing the blessing of the soul in verse 19, the next verse begins by stating that “it goes to the generation of his fathers” (Ps 49:20). The referent of the verbal action here (third feminine singular verb תברא) is the soul in verse 19a. The “fathers” mentioned in this verse (v. 20) are the collective ancestors, the dead mentioned consistently throughout the books of Kings. But their reference in Ps 49:20 presents a striking parallel with Gen 15:15–16. Not only does the soul go to the ancestors, but the motif is expressed transgenerationally. The reference to the “generation of his fathers” recalls the dead in Ps 49:12 who reside inside the tomb for generations. In particular, the practice of evoking names “upon the earth” (עלי אדמות) in Ps 49:12b is indicative of inheritance practices.⁶⁶ The land here is not the netherworld, unlike the ארץ in Ps 16:3. If anything, the term signifies the realm of the living, standing between the heavens and the netherworld. But it also relates to the manner by which inheritance, or patrimony, is claimed through the veneration of the dead.

Based on this analysis, it is possible to recognize a sentiment running through Ps 49:19–20 that is similar to that in verses 11–12. Even if a person blesses his own נפש rather than receiving that blessing from his family, ultimately they all go to the same place. The idea of humanity's common fate is again expressed through juxtaposed categories, but the contrast here is between the individual and the collective rather than the foolish and the wise. This contrast leads to the problem of the נפש. Given that Ps 49:19–20 (along with 49:12) is strongly associated with the dead and their care, the נפש in verse 19a may be an allusion to some form of monument.⁶⁷ This reading is supported by

66. Smith, “Invocation,” 107.

67. The use of נפש for “tomb” or some feature of funerary architecture (façade or cenotaph) is found in first-century CE Hebrew sources. It occurs in the Copper Scroll (3Q15, Col. I, 5) and in the first line of the Benei Hezir tomb inscription in Jerusalem, where it parallels “tomb” (קבר). On this description and the specific meaning of the term (favoring cenotaph), see D. Barag, “The 2000–2001 Exploration of the Tombs of Benei Hezir and Zechariah,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 53 (2003): 84–107. For other occurrences of this general nuance in Jewish literature, see M. J. Suriano, “Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hosea 9:1–6, and the Early History of the Soul,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 389 n. 18.

the similarity of verse 19a to Absalom's pillar and Katumuwa's Stele. In these cases, an object is created in order to preserve one's memory after death.

The poetic imagery in Ps 49:19 is purposefully vague regarding the sense of "soul" (נפש). The word certainly represents the subject, that is, the wealthy person. But the suggestion that it is an external object cannot be dismissed. The problem in this verse is one of materiality. The object that the wealthy person blesses—his soul—passes from the realm of the living (he blesses it during his lifetime) to that of the dead (v. 20). The "soul" (נפש) in this verse is an enduring object, a legacy. The change in the object's status, from life to death, may be related to the enigmatic ending in verse 20: "they [the fathers] are not able to see light." This reference describes the separation of the dead from the living. Regardless, in Ps 49:19–20, the נפש is something that glorifies the rich person in his life, but also something that eventually follows the common lot in death. These two images in verses 19–20 create a paradox between received status and self-gained glory, and this paradox is consistent with the rest of Ps 49.

The depiction of mortality in Ps 49:8–21 involves a series of contradictions, effectively critiquing functional immortality. For example, the psalmist says of redeeming the dead: one "will cease forever" (v. 9b). But then he asserts that one "lives on for eternity and will not see the pit" (v. 10a). These passages form an important part of the psalm's portrayal of postmortem existence. In verse 12, the dead exist in the grave "forever" (לעולם) and "for generation and generation" (לדור דור). The imagery here compares with the later statement in verse 20 that the soul goes in death "to the generation of his fathers, until eternity" (עד דור אבותיו עד נצח). But the psalmist again contradicts this ideal by asserting that the fathers/ancestors "will not see light" (v. 20b). Contained within these contrasting images is the psalmist's message about materiality and death. The term אחר 'after' occurs three times in this context. The idea of wealth being left behind by the rich man, for those who come after his death, found in Ps 49:1, is again raised in 49:18b where it says that the rich man's wealth (literally "his glory") will not descend into death after him. Though the dead continue to exist in the tomb, where they are counted among the ancestors, they are still detached from the things that they once enjoyed in life.

Ultimately, death's contradictory nature reveals the precariousness of life. This is the point of the repeated use of יקר in Ps 49:9, 13, and 21. Human existence is rare and delicate. This precarious nature is consistent with the peril of death that underscores the psalmist's discussion of mortality and material wealth. Though the dead will "cease forever" (v. 9b) they will not encounter "the pit" (שחת, v. 10b). In Ps 16:10b, the term "pit" (שחת) represents the liminality of death, paralleled with Sheol. Here in Ps 49:10b, liminality is expressed through the contradictions of verses 9–10.

Sheol plays a recognizable role within the intricate themes of death's boundaries and the precarious nature of life, and this role relates to the psalmist's description of redemption. Sheol in Ps 49:15–16 is described in terms that reflect ancient Near Eastern mythologies of death. In these verses Sheol is both a place and a personified figure seizing and consuming the dead. In the latter motif, the figure of Sheol parallels the figure of death in 49:15, which draws from the image of Mot found in Ugaritic literature.⁶⁸ The use of mythological symbols in these verses is a deliberate choice on the part of the psalmist to associate Sheol with something other than the provision that the dead would receive from the living. Regardless of how much care a person receives after he dies, his wealth cannot go with him. Although Sheol may wear away at his physical image (צִיר, 49:15b), Yahweh has the ability to deliver the psalmist from Sheol's hold. Once again, Sheol represents the threshold of death. As such, it serves as an existential threat, one that only the God of Israel can conquer. The psalmist here recognizes that all of humanity faces the same lot in death, thus true assurance can come only from Yahweh.

Psalm 88

Psalm 88 does not treat the theme of deliverance, and this is arguably its most distinguishing feature, especially when compared with Pss 16 and 49.⁶⁹ Indeed, Ps 88 is one of the bleakest passages in biblical literature. The psalmist begins by addressing Yahweh as the “God of my salvation” (Ps 88:2), but no statement of salvation follows. Instead, there is a series of dreary images associated with death and the tomb. Biblical scholars, as a result, have struggled to understand the poem's meaning.

The overwhelming theme of death has led some to understand Ps 88 as a portrayal of an inattentive and indifferent deity,⁷⁰ or even an expression of misfortune in the absence of Yahweh.⁷¹ The specific imagery has resulted

68. Gulde, *Der Tod*, 109–25. See also J. F. Healey, “Mot,” in *DDD*, 598–603.

69. This section represents my further thoughts on Ps 88, developed from M. J. Suriano, “Sheol, the Tomb, and the Problem of Postmortem Existence,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 16 (2016), doi:10.5508/jhs.2016.v16.a11.

70. See W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 78, where Ps 88 is described as “an embarrassment to conventional faith.”

71. E. Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 397–98. Brueggemann, *Message*, 78–79 objects to this interpretation. See also the recent suggestion that Ps 88 is a statement of divine wrath refracted through the transience

in interpretations of the psalm as a near-death experience, as a moment of intense danger, or as a response in which the psalmist imagines himself in the realm of the dead.⁷² The multiple issues in the interpretation of Ps 88 only highlight Sheol's ambiguity, as this entity appears near the beginning of the psalm (v. 4). But as the full translation of Ps 88 shows, the ambiguous and enigmatic nature of Sheol permeates the entire poem after the incipit of v. 1.

- 2). Yahweh, the god of my salvation, by day I cried out, at night you touched me. 3). My prayer goes before you; incline your ear to my cry. 4). Because my soul is sated with calamity, and my life has been brought to Sheol. 5). I am reckoned with those who descend the pit; I am like a man with no strength. 6). Among the dead, I am free like the slain, those who lay down in the tomb that you do not remember anymore, and they who are cutoff from your hand. 7). You have placed me in the lowest pit, in the darkness, in the depths. 8). Your wrath leans upon me, and all of your breakers oppress. *selāh* 9). You have made my associates shun me, and set me as taboo to them. 10). My eyes languish from affliction. Each day I have cried out to you, O Yahweh; my palms wide open to you. 11). Can the dead perform wonders—if the Rephaim can arise? *selāh* 12). Can your love or your faithfulness be told by those in the tomb, or (by those) in Abaddon? 13). Are your wonders known in darkness—your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
- 14). As for me, O Yahweh, I beseech you! And in the morning my prayer is before you.
- 15). Why do you reject my soul, Yahweh, [and] hide your face from me? 16). I am oppressed and my youth fleeting. I have lifted up your terrors—O that I am overwhelmed. 17). Your wrath passes over me, your dread destroys me. 18). They churn about me like water, they overwhelm me together. 19). You have made me distant from loved ones and neighbors. My associates: darkness.

of life and human mortality, made by J. Schnocks, "Vergänglichkeit und Gottesferne," in *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in Seiner Umwelt: Theologische, Religionsgeschichtliche, Archäologische und Ikonographische Aspekte*, ed. A. Berlejung and B. Janowski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 5–7. In spite of the difficult interpretation of death and the wrath of God, Schnocks's emphasis on mortality is insightful.

72. Barth, *Die Errettung*, 88–89, 110–11.

Beyond the incipit (v. 1), Ps 88 is organized into three strophes.⁷³ The first strophe (vv. 2–10a) includes the psalm's established setting, which is made explicit in verses 4–5. Here the psalmist, as plaintiff, reveals the details of his plight in the clause that begins in verse 4a with כי 'because'. The setting is expressed in verses 4–5 by means of an A B // B' A' pattern, which is built on the themes of condition (A // A') and location (B // B'):

- (A) ^{4a}. Because my soul is sated with calamity,
 (B) ^{4b}. And my life has been brought to Sheol.
 (B') ^{5a}. I am reckoned with those who descend the pit;
 (A') ^{5b}. I am like a man with no strength.

The A B // B' A' pattern is important because it unifies the multiple images that run through the first two strophes: the image of death in the first and the contemplation of postmortem existence in the second (vv. 10b–13). Moreover, the location that is evoked is clearly associated with mortuary practices. This is evident in the terms found in the passage, from the twice-used term "pit" (בּוֹר, vv. 5a and 7a) to the obvious example of "tomb" (קֶבֶר, vv. 6b and 12a). The verbs that govern these terms, "descend" (יִרְדֹּךְ) in verse 5a and "lie [down]" (שָׁכַב) in verse 6a,⁷⁴ are also typical of burial descriptions. Finally, those whom Yahweh will "no longer remember" (זָכַר) in verse 6b refers to those lying in the tomb. The psalmist evokes not only burial imagery but also the critical nature of death and memory (see 2 Sam 18:18).⁷⁵

The imagery of the first strophe (vv. 2–10a) leads to a series of rhetorical questions in verses 10b–13 that are set within the realm of the dead. The rhetoric implicitly denies any divine presence in this realm.⁷⁶ In Ps 88:11, the dead, along

73. The poetic pattern of Ps 88 has often been delineated into three strophes (vv. 2–10a // vv. 10b–13 // vv. 14–19) since H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen: Überseht und erklärt*, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 381–82; see, e.g., Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 391–93. For different interpretations, see B. Weber, "Jhwh, Gott Meiner Rettung!': Beobachtungen und Erwägungen Zur Struktur von Psalm LXXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 595–607.

74. For the burial sense of שָׁכַב, see M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 38–39, 71–72.

75. The phrase that ends the first strophe in v. 10a, "my eyes languish from affliction" (עֵינַי דָּאִבָּה מִן עֲנִי), recalls the use of ocular imagery in Job 11:20 and 17:5; see R. E. Tappy, "Did the Dead Ever Die in Biblical Judah?," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 298 (1995): 63, following Pedersen, *Israel*, 1: 179. This metaphor in Job may indicate the loss of patrimony and serve as a warning by the righteous sufferer to his companions against any attempt to profit from his loss.

76. Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 395.

with the prominent inhabitants of the netherworld (רפאים), are denied Yahweh's miraculous works, and they cannot worship him there. But this theme of divine isolation needs to be properly qualified in light of the evidence gathered from biblical literature and funerary inscriptions. These sources, which include other psalms, indicate a belief that Yahweh's power extended to the tomb. Furthermore, the symbolism found in Ps 88 not only evokes images of the tomb but also finds parallels among mortuary remains.⁷⁷ In verse 10b, the psalmist cries out to Yahweh with his palms outstretched, an image familiar from the iconography of Tomb II at Khirbet el-Qôm (Makkedah). The carved hand at Khirbet el-Qôm accompanies an inscription (*Qom* 3, discussed in chapter 3) invoking divine protection from Yahweh and Asherah. Similarly, in Ps 88:15b the statement that Yahweh has hidden his face from the psalmist seemingly contradicts the imagery of the Ketef Hinnom silver amulets (*KHinn* 1:17–18 and *KHinn* 2:8–9), where the shining face of Yahweh is an important component of the blessings that accompany the individual into the tomb. Psalm 88 does not deny Yahweh's protection. Rather, it examines the significance of Yahweh's absence.

The realm of the dead in Ps 88 echoes that of a burial place, whether it is a tomb or a pit. But it also incorporates elements found in netherworld mythologies, most notably in the appearance of the Rephaim.⁷⁸ The series of netherworld motifs are bundled together to create a complicated theme that is consistent with a bad death. In Ps 88:12–13, the psalmist describes a realm that is a place of destruction (אבדון 'Abaddon'), as well as a place of darkness that is called the "land of forgetfulness" (בארץ נשיה). The themes that run throughout the psalm are at times discordant. Yet their varied imagery reveals a lack of assurance. Isolation, one of the most powerful themes in this psalm, feeds this general sense of insecurity. The psalmist, isolated and alone, encounters mortality by becoming imperiled by death.

The image of isolation, which is constructed through multiple motifs, contrasts starkly with Pss 16 and 49, where the psalmist speaks of deliverance from Sheol. In those psalms Sheol is temporary, yet this aspect is lacking in Ps 88. But a comparison of these contrasting motifs, along with the

77. J. D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 55–56 suggested that the shining face of Yahweh could be seen as an effort to counteract the darkness of the tomb, which is a motif found in Ps 88:6, 12.

78. The Rephaim in Ugaritic and Phoenician texts are a category of royal ancestor. They are divested of this prestigious status in biblical literature and presented as powerless residents of the netherworld; see Isa 14:9; Suriano, *Politics*, 149–64; and B. R. Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel*, Ilex Foundation Series (Boston: Ilex Foundation and Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012), 195–99.

overwhelming sense of isolation in Ps 88, suggests liminality—that is, the marginalization that the psalmist endures in Ps 88 is temporary in Pss 16 and 49. The term “Sheol” thus conveys a kind of limbo. According to this interpretation, the nature of Sheol is consistent throughout the selected psalms. Existence within Sheol’s liminal boundaries, separating the living from the dead, is existence in a marginalized state of being. This status is something that can be temporary, as revealed in the songs of deliverance. But it also can be a permanent state of limbo, which is the implication of Ps 88.

Given the predominant theme of death in Ps 88 and its particular motifs of burial, it is useful to compare these themes and motifs with Judahite mortuary practices because both the psalm and the bench tomb engage categories of marginality and liminality. The isolation of the psalmist compares with the status of the corpse in the bench tomb because both are cases of a marginalized subject. As discussed in chapter 1, the dead body becomes a ritualized object inside the Judahite bench tomb. This ritualization, evident in the customs and practices that surround the body, is based upon ideas of transition. Within the family tomb, the dead could transition to a new status, that of ancestor. But this involves enduring a marginalized condition during the time of transition, when the individual is no longer among the living but not yet among the ancestors. This temporary status of Sheol corresponds with the liminal experience of the corpse inside the Judahite bench tomb. The dead body requires care and feeding during this liminal period, and the state of the psalmist is one of dependence upon Yahweh. Sheol in the psalms stands for a perilous middle state, regardless of whether it specifically refers to the corpse inside the tomb. The liminal experience of death, the situation of the dead, and the process of dying all contribute to a larger paradigm explored in the poetry of the Psalms. The overwhelmingly dreary imagery in Ps 88 is a reflection on this process. But how should we understand the lack of assurance or the related motifs of divine absence? The marginalized individual, during phases of liminality, exists without a fixed state. As such, that individual’s identity is perilous. Any disruption to the process of transition could have dire results.

If there is any hope in Ps 88, it is an implied assurance found in the rhetorical refrain of verses 10–12. The concern here is that the dead are not forgotten. The “land of forgetfulness” in verse 12b relates back to the question of those whom Yahweh no longer remembers. The nuance of the verb *נָסַח* strongly suggests ancestor veneration. The memory of the dead is threatened by this marginalized status. But remembering the dead in biblical literature also involves remembering their relationship with Israel’s God, whether covenantal or otherwise. To be forgotten by one’s deity is a problem of divine absence. The isolation of the psalmist in Ps 88 entails all of these aspects, but

it is also embodied through material imagery drawn from mortuary practices. The embodiment of the psalmist reveals a concern that is likewise reflected in the condition of the body lying on the burial bench. In both cases, the individual is isolated, vulnerable, and in need of care and protection.

Importantly, what emerges from the collection of images and motifs is a process that unfolds through the psalmist's increasingly marginalized condition (Ps 88:4–10 and 14–19). This condition is consistent with a state of transition. Death, as the ultimate transition, becomes paradigmatic for episodes of individual peril. The process of dying involves a liminal period during which the psalmist is alone. Without a fixed state of being, the psalmist is isolated from friends and family, and his relationship with Yahweh is jeopardized. Throughout the psalm, he expresses his existential angst, trapped between the conceptual boundaries that separate the living and define death.

Psalm 116

The final text reviewed here, Ps 116, is a song of thanksgiving.⁷⁹ The point of the thanksgiving is deliverance from death, and so it is no surprise to see the psalmist refer to Sheol. The focus of the poem shifts in order to cover various concerns (cultic worship, mortality) and combine multiple literary motifs.⁸⁰ The point of the psalmist's thankfulness is his deliverance, which is expressed through lament-like motifs at the beginning of the psalm. The description of deliverance is expressed in life and death terminology, which offers a constructive comparison for the similar theme found in Ps 16.

- 1). I love Yahweh because he hears my voice, my supplications.
- 2). Because he inclines his ear to me in my days that I invoke (Yahweh).
- 3). I am encompassed by the cords of death, and the distress of Sheol has found me. Distress and sorrow I have found.⁴⁾ But the name of Yahweh I invoke: "Please Yahweh, deliver my soul!"

79. Titled "A Psalm of Thanksgiving" by Weiser, *Psalms*, 718.

80. These factors, along with the presence of Aramaisms, suggest that Ps 116 is a composite text that was probably redacted at a late stage of the Psalter's history. Indeed, versions of the Psalter divided the poem into two separate psalms, at Ps 116:10; see H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 385–86. The shifting themes also created difficulties in the form-critical analysis of Ps 116; see F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 214–15 (citing Gunkel). For a study of the Aramaic features, see M. L. Barré, "Psalm 116: Its Structure and Its Enigmas," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 61–78.

- 5). Gracious is Yahweh, and righteous. For our God is compassionate! ⁶⁾ Yahweh watches over the simple; I was down and he saved me. ⁷⁾ Return to your rest, my soul, for Yahweh is bountiful on your behalf. ⁸⁾ For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my foot from stumbling. ⁹⁾ I will walk about before Yahweh in the lands of the living. ¹⁰⁾ I believe, for I myself speak in my great suffering. ¹¹⁾ I myself have said: "all men are liars." ¹²⁾ How can I return to Yahweh all of his bounties that are *placed* upon me? ¹³⁾ The cup of salvation I will raise and invoke the name Yahweh. ¹⁴⁾ My vow to Yahweh I will fulfill, presented before his people.
- 15). Precious in Yahweh's eyes is the death of his faithful ones.
- 16). Please Yahweh, because I am your servant. I am your servant, son of your maid-servant. You have released me from my bonds. ¹⁷⁾ To you I will sacrifice thanksgiving offerings, I will invoke the name Yahweh!
- 18). My vow to Yahweh I will fulfill, presented before his people.
- 19). In the courts of the house of Yahweh—In your midst, O Jerusalem—all praise Yah!

That the psalm frequently shifts focus most likely indicates an extensive redaction history. For example, the statement regarding death in Ps 116:15 appears rather abruptly.⁸¹ Within the variegated imagery of Ps 116, however, two elements stand out. The first is the invocation (קרא) of the divine name, which is anticipated in Ps 116:2 and recurs in verses 4, 13, and 17. The second is the *Wiederaufnahme* of Ps 116:14 and 18. The latter element represents a key component of the psalm's cultic perspective, which is made explicit in the final verse (Ps 116:19). The former element is also consistent with this perspective, and as such it provides a point of comparison with Ps 16. Near the beginning of that poem, the psalmist proclaims that he will not praise ("lift up") the names of the holy ones (Ps 16:4b). In Ps 116, the repeated invocation of

81. The abruptness of the verse has led to speculation regarding the meaning of יקר; see Emerton, "How Does the LORD Regard," 155. Barré, "Psalm 116," 61–78 has defended the translation "precious" by comparing the passage to an Aramaic saying in lines 92–93 of Ahiqar, which describes wisdom as "precious in the presence of Shamash." See "Ahiqar," trans. J. M. Lindenberger (*OTP* 2:499). This translation is defended in this chapter, albeit for other reasons and in light of the root's appearance in Ps 49. Less compelling is Barré's reconstruction of המותה 'the death' as an Aramaic word for "trust, faith," ההמנות. The resulting translation is convenient: "precious is the faith of his faithful ones." But the reconstruction is unsupported by any ancient version; e.g., Ps 115:6 LXX translates המותה as ὁ θάνατος.

the divine name contrasts with the performance of mortuary rituals. In other words, in both psalms priority is given to divine worship.

The divine invocation divides the psalm into four sections: Ps 116:1–2; 3–4; 5–13; and 14–18 (plus v. 19).⁸² The repeated statements regarding the psalmist's vow (the *Wiederaufnahme* of Ps 116:14 and 18) demarcate the final section, forming a bridge with the conclusion: a refrain that invokes cultic worship in Jerusalem. But further connections with Ps 16 appear at the heart of Ps 116, in its second and third sections, beginning with the reference to Sheol in Ps 116:3. The parallelism of this verse compares closely with Ps 18:5–6 but provides an important contrast with Ps 16:6.⁸³ The מוצרי שאול and חבלי מות—the binding power of death and Sheol, respectively—convey overwhelming might in Ps 116:3. This might is largely unavoidable, affording only hope in divine protection. In Ps 16:6a, the inevitable cords are presented in positive terms, unlike the fate from which the speaker seeks deliverance in Ps 116:3. In fact, the psalmist later alludes to the “cords of death” (116:3) when he refers to his release from “bonds” (מוסר) in 116:16b.

The full force of this allusion, and the admission of divine deliverance in Ps 116, can be appreciated its comparison with Ps 16. Their parallel goes beyond the contrasting motif of cords, binding the psalmist for good or bad. The comparable images in these two psalms also include references to cups (called the “cup of salvation” in Ps 116:13a) as well as the mention of the “lands of the living” in Ps 116:9b.⁸⁴ The later image not only presents a contrast with the ארץ in Ps 16:3, where the word stands for the netherworld, but also compares with “path of life” (ארח חיים) in Ps 16:11a. In the final verse of Ps 16, the “path of life” is the alternative to Sheol and the pit (the path of death). Likewise, in Ps 116, the “lands of the living” in verse 9 is the alternative to death, from which the psalmist is delivered in the previous verse (Ps 116:8).⁸⁵

82. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 386–89 divides the poem differently, with seven sections: vv. 1–2, 3–6, 7–9, 10–11, 12–14, 15–16, and 17–19. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 216–19 divide Ps 116 in similar ways; the only difference is that they take v. 12 as a separate unit (see also Weiser, *Psalms*, 719–20). It seems best to recognize repetition, rather than cultic themes, as the structuring device.

83. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 217 comment that Ps 116 here “borrows words from Ps 18:5a.” They also draw parallels with Ps 40:13 and Jonah 2:6.

84. The cup imagery is typically understood to be cultic and related to temple worship. See the discussions in Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 388 and Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 218–19, with sources.

85. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 217–18 suggest that the reference to places of rest in Ps 116:7a (where the *nomin loci* מנוח is plural) is meant to contrast with Sheol in v. 3. The spatial contrast and the reference to the places of rest in v. 7a would then relate to the “land of the

In Ps 16, the speaker extols the positive outcome of his devotion to Yahweh, and this is expressed by opposing Yahwistic worship to the veneration of the dead. In Ps 116, the concern is similar, though not fully realized. The comparison of Ps 16:10 and 116:15 will offer insight into the relationship between the God of Israel and the dead. In Ps 16:10, the assurance of Yahweh's deliverance from Sheol is expressed in the parallel statement that the deity will not let his "faithful one" (חסיד) see the pit. Conversely, Ps 116:15 contains the statement that the death of "his faithful ones" (חסידיו) is troubling for Yahweh. The two verses do not present a contradiction. The point in Ps 116:15 is that divine intervention on the psalmist's behalf is expected because of Yahweh's compassion for those devoted to him. In the next verse, Ps 116:16, the psalmist expresses his devotion as he declares that Yahweh freed him from bondage.

Once again, the discussion of death in the psalms raises the question of what death meant in the world of the biblical writer. In Ps 16:10, the psalmist claims he will not be abandoned to Sheol, and in Ps 116:8 the psalmist offers thanks for his deliverance. But the accompanying imagery in these two psalms reveals a common theme: the inevitability of fate. The question that emerges, then, is how human mortality affects devotion to Yahweh. The discussions of personal plight in these psalms are articulated in ways that draw forth death imagery. Certainly the psalms are removed from their original context and recontextualized in their present literary setting. But this simply means that their respective concerns can be applied to multiple situations. The psalmists' perspective is not just that of the dead. The psalmists' words can also be meaningful in contexts of sickness or general peril.⁸⁶ But death constitutes the baseline for comparison in these psalms, and Sheol plays a crucial role. Sheol is associated with death and represents the marginalizing forces that imperil the self. As a marginalizing force, Sheol forms the liminal divide that separates life from death.

Conclusion

The literary motifs that accompany Sheol in the Psalms depict it as a liminal place, a conceptual boundary between life and death that affects the status of

living" in v. 9b. They follow B. Janowski, "Dankbarkeit: ein anthropologischer Grundbegriff im Spiegel der Toda-Psalmen," in *Ritual und Poesie: Formen und Orte religiöser Dichtung im Alten Orient, im Judentum und im Christentum*, ed. E. Zenger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2003), 106–8 in recognizing a sense of spatiality that runs through Ps 116. This sense is seen as cultic, and temple focused.

86. C. Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 50–51; see Levenson, *Resurrection*, 78.

the individual. Situated in Sheol, the psalmist experiences the negative forces of death. This experience is relayed in terms that clearly convey personal peril; as such, the poetic descriptions of Sheol involve the self. The term נַפֶּשׁ here is the same term that is used for dead bodies in other texts, such as Lev 21:1. In those passages, where the impurity of death is described in physical terms, the soul/self (נַפֶּשׁ) is defined according to social roles (discussed in chapter 4). In the Psalms, however, the soul/self (נַפֶּשׁ) who is imperiled by death is expressed poetically through individual statements. That is, the self experiences death and cries out to the God of Israel. The individual agency of the self in these passages is most evident in the lament and terror experienced in Ps 88. But in each of the surveyed psalms, the literary depiction of Sheol served as the context for the psalmist's selfhood. It was a state of being that provoked the psalmist's petition.

How we define Sheol, then, is a matter of context. The experience of death that the psalmist endures in Sheol is similar to the ritual setting of the tomb. In both situations, the individual is marginalized and exists in an unstable state that requires care and protection. In both situations, the conceptual boundaries of death are defined in ways that differ from our modern definitions. What is experienced is a process of dying, a transition that slowly divests the individual of his or her identity. In the Psalms, the literary depiction of this perilous state is paradigmatic. Although the poetry of the Psalms often evokes a sense of the tomb, the portrayed situations can be interpreted in different ways. The psalmist's state can thus apply to multiple situations, such as danger, sickness, or injury. It is the idea of death as a dynamic process that establishes this paradigm. This idea underscores the meaning of Sheol as a reference to the marginalizing forces that threaten the individual, whether it is the dying body or a person endangered.

If Sheol refers to the marginalizing forces of death, it offers further comparison with the ritualized setting of the bench tomb. The process of dying is temporary. As discussed in chapter 1, the dead individual exists in an unstable state of being until her or his transformation is complete. The condition of the body as it transitions from corpse to bones exemplifies this process. Liminality is temporal, referring to the period of time within which the defunct individual is no longer part of a living community but not yet joined to the ancestors. The marginalized condition of the psalmist is also temporary, since the psalmist can be delivered from Sheol. In other words, under the proper conditions, Sheol is not necessarily a permanent state.

Sheol's impermanence conveys a sense of liminality, in both time and space. The liminality of Sheol, in turn, addresses some of the perplexing issues involved in defining it. Just as everyone endures the process of dying,

all go to Sheol. For some it is temporary, simply a stage in the natural transition of death. Inside the bench tomb, this process is negotiated through ritual practices. Ideally, these mortuary practices lead to the transfer of the dead into the collective space of the repository. To paraphrase Pedersen, the family tomb is both bad and good. Initially, during the primary act of burial, the dead require care and protection. The marginalizing force of this experience is expressed through the symbolic representation of Sheol as a tomb. But the dead ultimately become reunited with their kin inside the ritual space of the tomb. In psalms that celebrate salvation from Sheol, such as Pss 16 and 116, the poetry is focused on the individual. The ideal of joining one's ancestors in death remains in the background.

Epilogue

THE INVISIBLE TOMB

ELIE WIESEL, WHO survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald, once described his work as “a *matzeva*, an invisible tombstone, erected to the memory of the dead unburied” during the Holocaust.¹ Writing became a powerful tool for remembering the dead, a substitute for erecting a monument (or tombstone). Here history and memory collide in Wiesel’s writings, compelled by the tragic events of the twentieth century and driven by his commitment to record his personal experience for posterity. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who died at Buchenwald, also appealed to the tombstone metaphor: “history indeed resembles a crowded cemetery, where room must constantly be made for new tombstones.”² In their writings, both conceived historical memory figuratively in terms of mortuary culture. Writing history is like constructing a funerary monument: it marks the absence of those who have left us, but it also involves making choices about how to remember the past. Who should be buried here, and who should not? How should we remember those who are gone? Wiesel and Halbwachs have both impacted how we look at modern society, each in his own way. But the association of history and memory with mortuary practices in their twentieth-century work is not a new idea. Their impulse to view the past through imagery of the tomb has a precursor in how the afterlife was conceived in the Hebrew Bible.

History in the Hebrew Bible was a crowded tomb filled with the bones of ancestors. But the embodiment of the afterlife in biblical literature served a greater purpose. Certainly the basic concern in functional immortality was one of memory, yet in Judaism the ancestors and their histories continue to serve as charters for living communities. This continuity of mortuary culture

1. E. Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 8.

2. M. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 52.

involves a recognizable conservatism that is often typical of the human response to death. Not surprisingly, aspects of Judah's mortuary culture endured during the Second Temple period. But the meaning of these practices changed as life and society changed. Extramural burials, for example, continued to be the norm, but their purpose and function become focused on purity in written sources like the Temple Scroll.

You are not to do as the nations do: they bury their dead everywhere, even inside their homes. Rather, you must set apart places in your land where you will bury your dead. Between every four cities you must designate one place to bury.

—The Temple Scroll (11Q19 Col. XLVIII, 11b–14a)³

The extramural cemetery is initially presented here in terms of cultural distinction, yet it is no longer associated directly with the patrimony of a village. Instead, a single bounded cemetery serves a network of villages. In the idealized world of this Dead Sea scroll, the shared burial site served to relegate the dead to one place in order to maintain the purity of the communities surrounding Jerusalem, the city of the temple.

Aspects of funerary architecture, along with related interment practices, also survive the Iron Age and are present in Jewish culture during the Second Temple period. These particular features go beyond the general importance of the family tomb. Hellenistic period tombs occasionally replicate the bench tomb design long after the memory of the four-room house had faded.⁴ The practice of secondary burial also continues. Although repositories would still be used occasionally, they are gradually replaced by the use of charnel rooms before ultimately giving way to the ossuary.⁵ The trend moves from

3. Translation mine. For an edition of the text, see "11Q19 11Temple^a," trans. F. García Martínez and E. J. Tigchelaar (*DSSSE* 2:1266–67). See further, R. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 22–23, and 488.

4. A. Kloner and Y. Zelinger, "The Evolution of Tombs from the Iron Age through the Second Temple Period," in *"Up to the Gates of Ekron": Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. S. W. Crawford et al. (Jerusalem: W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and Israel Exploration Society, 2007), 209–20. I owe this point to a comment by Aren Maeir made at the joint American Schools of Oriental Research/Society of Biblical Literature conference session "Memory and History," San Antonio, Texas, November 20, 2016.

5. E. M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth. Secondary Burials in Their Ancient Near Eastern Setting* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 7–10; Meyers, "Secondary Burials

the collective to the individual, as an important element of mortuary culture is reconfigured to fit a changing society.⁶ Already by the Hellenistic period we see emerging concepts of individual resurrection and postmortem judgment (2 Macc 7:10–14), most notably in Dan 12:1–3. By the early Roman period we even have a few scattered instances in Judea of shaft graves for individual burials, with the cemetery at Khirbet Qumran offering the best example.⁷ Yet these developments never diminished the significance of the ancestors. Their importance before and after the exile resulted in both continuity and change in mortuary culture.

The continued significance of the ancestors in the Second Temple period was precisely because of their historical importance. Configured as ancestors, the dead shaped the past. This role was a key feature in covenantal traditions, yet the afterlife implications of ancestors have not been fully appreciated. For instance, Jan Assmann has written that in ancient Israel “history had the place that was occupied in Egyptian thought by the afterlife.”⁸ Assmann’s insight here is keen, yet it is based on an understanding of the Hebrew Bible as *Heilsgeschichte*. The salvation history of Israel is juxtaposed with a well-defined afterlife system of judgment and reward. But Israel’s foil in this comparison is Egyptian religion rather than Christianity.⁹ Without such a system of

in Palestine,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 33 (1970): 17–25. L. Y. Rahmani, “Ancient Jerusalem’s Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Four,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 109–112.

6. Of course, the meaning behind this trend is something that Meyers and Rahmani debated. It should also be noted that the ossuary could hold multiple burials (though not many), even if it was ideally suited for one person; see J. Magness, “Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 121–54 and Magness, “Why Ossuaries?,” in Crawford et al., “Up to the Gates of Ekron,” 228–39.

7. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 13–22, and B. Schultz, “The Qumran Cemetery: 150 Years of Research,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 13 (2006): 194–228. The shaft graves at Qumran, ‘En el-Ghewir, and at sites south of Jerusalem are most likely Jewish due to their location.

8. Quote from J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 414. This is not to dismiss Assmann’s brilliant work. Setting aside the critical issues involved in his history of biblical monotheism, Assmann accurately points to the main underlying issue in the Hebrew Bible’s ideology of death: generations. I find his reading of Ezek 18:2–4 both compelling and insightful. The prophet challenges the idea of divine retribution in order to collapse time into the historical moment of his exilic community, refocusing divine promise on their present situation. This reading sets the stage nicely for the reburial and reinstatement of Israel in the land that occurs in Ezek 37.

9. In the closing words of his book, Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 416–17 suggests that the similar theme of salvation in the afterlife led to the popularity of Christianity throughout Egypt in late antiquity.

postmortem judgment, ancient Israel could envision reward and punishment only in this life. The Hebrew Bible's transgenerational ideals were thus ultimately as hopeless as the dreary tombs that previous generations of Old Testament scholars had written about. Hope lies in this life, not the next, because there was only an *afterdeath*.

The problems evident in this position, which I have challenged throughout this book, are well articulated in Assmann's own comments: "the questions did not originate from a longing for immortality, for this found a solution only in Egyptian religion, not in that of the Hebrew Bible, but from a longing for justice. The finitude of human life was experienced as something painful, not only with regard to the boundedness of its time but also and especially with regard to the imperfection of its fulfillment."¹⁰ The ancient Egyptian concept of the afterlife, like Christian soteriology according to the ancient creeds, casts a problematic shadow on the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible. This shadow is nothing new, but it must be resisted. The view that one could transcend death through the continuity of family, which is the essence of functional immortality, was rich and meaningful in the world of the Old Testament's writers. This ideology of death was not myopically focused upon the past. Nor was it obsessed with divine retribution meted out across generations. The biblical writers drew from the past to point to the future,¹¹ and in this manner the tomb could serve as a powerful symbol of hope.

If we turn to the example presented at the beginning of this book, the divine promises to Abraham in Gen 15:15–16, it becomes possible to recognize the future outlook of mortuary culture in the biblical world. The motifs of reunion with ancestors, proper burial, and progeny together form a constellation of meaning. But this meaning relates to more than just the ideals of a good death. It points forward to a time when Israel had settled into its inheritance. This same trajectory is found in the epilogues for the dead in Kings, where the ideals of death were drawn upon to point to the prospects of the kingdom.¹² Each dead king's epilogue ended with the introduction of his son, the new king. The repeated reference to the royal tombs also established an important sense of continuity. Death is transition, and the obligation to the dead was founded upon ideals of continuity, here in the sense of dynastic

10. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 415.

11. I made this point at the end of M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 176.

12. Suriano, *Politics*, 172–76.

succession. This obligation underscored the dynasty's desire for the future of its lineage, celebrated in royal psalms like Ps 45:17, "In your fathers' place will be your sons . . ." Joseph's bones and their reburial in the land promised to Abraham was likewise a narrative of hope. His interment in Shechem is the fulfillment, not just of Abraham's first covenant, but also of the oath the tribal ancestors swore with Joseph. The fulfillment of Joseph's oath, symbolized through bones and secondary burial, could also serve as a message of hope for exiled communities.

The most famous example of the tomb as a symbol of future hope in the Hebrew Bible is Ezekiel's vision of dry bones (Ezek 37). Although this passage is typically seen as a classic example of resurrection in the Old Testament, its stated emphasis in Ezek 37:11 is on the collective rather than the individual. Indeed, the image of the collective dead constitutes a critical point in its message.¹³ The striking imagery of this passage resonates with secondary burial practices just as the story of Joseph's bones does.¹⁴

The hand of Yahweh came upon me. He brought me out by Yahweh's spirit and set me down in the valley. It was full of bones. ² He led me all around them; there were very many of them spread over the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "O son of man, can these bones live again?" I replied, "O Yahweh my Lord, only you know." ⁴ And he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh! ⁵ Thus said Yahweh my Lord to these bones: I will cause a spirit to enter you and you shall live again. ⁶ I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you,

13. As J. D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 156–65, esp. 162–63, notes, the resurrection imagery in Ezek 37 is not only collective but also symbolic. That is, the prophetic vision does not predict some eschatological event such as the Day of Judgment or the World to Come. Rather, it symbolizes the return from exile.

14. K. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. J. Nogalski (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 215–16. I extend this comparison to the motif of reburial. It should be noted that reburial in both accounts (Joseph and the dry bones in Ezekiel) does not conform exactly to secondary burial customs in the southern Levant during the first millennium BCE and later. The Judahite repository was situated inside the site of primary burial, like the custom of ossuaries that followed in Second Temple Judaism. Given the importance of caring for bones, however, the general comparison is still valid. The comparison is supported by Saul Olyan's study of the reburial motif in Ezek 37, a study that analyzes the biblical text in light of cuneiform sources that describe reburying the dead. See S. Olyan, "Unnoticed Resonances of Tomb Opening and Transportation of the Remains of the Dead in Ezekiel 37:12–14," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 491–501.

and I will put a spirit into you. And you shall live again. And you shall know that I am Yahweh!"

⁷⁾ I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, each bone to its counterpart bone.

⁸⁾ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them. But there was no spirit in them. ⁹⁾ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the spirit, prophesy, O son of man! Say to the spirit: Thus said Yahweh my Lord: Come, O spirit, from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live again." ¹⁰⁾ I prophesied as he commanded me. The spirit entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹⁾ And he said to me, "O son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is destroyed. We are *utterly* cut off!" ¹²⁾ Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said Yahweh my Lord: I am going to open your tombs and lift you out of the tombs, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel. ¹³⁾ You shall know, O my people, that I am Yahweh, when I have opened your tombs and lifted you out of your tombs. ¹⁴⁾ I will put my spirit into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own ground. Then you shall know that I Yahweh have spoken and have acted"—thus declares Yahweh.

—Ezek 37:1–14

Care for the dead is a divine prerogative in this prophetic vision, just as it is when Joseph's bones are reburied. The care for Joseph's bones, performed by his descendants, served as a basis for the divine blessing of the Israelites in the land. The promise of reburial by the God of Israel in Ezek 37 likewise symbolizes divine providence. The narrative of bones in both examples is one of hope, and this hope is tied to a common theme: return to the promised land.¹⁵ But the funerary imagery in Ezek 37:1–14 is much more

15. In light of the comparison in Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 215–16 between Joseph's reburial and Ezek 37:1–14, it is interesting to note the following quote from Levenson, *Resurrection*, 162 (italics mine): "given Israel's long-standing pattern of disobedience to God's laws (which, in [Ezekiel's] mind, brought about their national destruction and exile), their undeserved repatriation was surely an *exodus* from death to life: no one who knows God and has experienced the fulfillment of his promise, it would seem, is dead."

specific.¹⁶ The valley of dry bones is a repository writ large. The envisioned place is external, somewhere outside of Ezekiel's normal dwelling, a valley where he had to be transported by Yahweh (Ezek 37:1). The valley consists of an undifferentiated mass of disarticulated bones. Yet this repository is not exclusive to any one particular family or lineage.¹⁷ Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is the repository of the "whole house of Israel."

If we understand the valley of dry bones as the grand repository of all Israel, it is possible to recognize an important element of mortuary culture in the prophet's message. The act of transplanting a living community from exile to their homeland is conceived as a reversal of death. This reversal resonates with Judahite mortuary practices and the Hebrew Bible's embodied afterlife ideal. The refleshing of the collective bones, transforming them into individual bodies that live, is the opposite of the process of decomposition that occurred inside the bench tomb. It is a reversal of the transition of the dead that took place between the burial bench and the repository. Just as the body enters the tomb as an intact corpse, destined to join its collective ancestry of bones inside, the bodies leave Ezekiel's grand repository intact and now alive.

Ezekiel draws from preexilic Judahite mortuary practices in his symbolic story of bones, but the concern in this prophetic vision is distinctly exilic. The social dislocation experienced by the Israelites is described in terms of detachment from their ancestral homeland.¹⁸ It is a denial of the patrimony that was symbolized in their family tombs. Ezekiel's community may have seen themselves as dying slowly in exile, and their words reveal the relational issues caused when death occurred far away from one's patrimony. The exilic community perceived themselves as marginalized, "cut off" (נִכָּר) like the dead in Ps 88:6 whom Yahweh no longer remembered.¹⁹ The divine response to

16. The redaction of this passage is complicated, as scholars have debated the relationship between Ezek 37:1–11 and 12–14. Funerary imagery, however, runs throughout these verses. For a full exegesis, see W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. P. D. Hanson, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). See also the brief review of redactional studies in Olyan, "Unnoticed Resonances," 491 n. 1.

17. The dead are described in Ezek 37:9 as הַרוּגִים 'slain ones', which implies the history of destruction experienced by the exiles. The reference to 'slain ones' also provides a conceptual parallel with the valley of dead bodies described in Ezek 39:11–20, where Israel's enemies remain unburied; see F. Stavrakopoulou, "Gog's Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11–20," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 67–84.

18. See also the description of this valley in Stavrakopoulou, "Gog's Grave," 83–84.

19. Olyan, "Unnoticed Resonances," 493; Olyan, "'We Are Utterly Cut Off': Some Possible Nuances of *nigzarnû lānû* in Ezek 37:11," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (2003): 43–51.

this problem is a symbolic reversal of secondary burial practices, where the transfer of human remains results in dry bones becoming living peoples. The repositories of their family tombs are replaced, metaphorically, by a greater repository encompassing a new Israel reimagined by the exiled prophet. The image of a collection of bones, especially as it symbolizes past generations of ancestors, is used here to represent a future generation who will rise up from the tomb and return to the land.

Care for the dead as a divine prerogative becomes more apparent in postexilic biblical literature. A beautiful example is the “eternal name” (שם עולם) promised to the eunuch in Third Isaiah (Isa 56:3b–5). Divine care comes as the result of covenantal faithfulness. Israel’s God will preserve the eunuch’s memory in place of the children he does not have. His posterity instead will be a “monument and name” (יד ושם) endowed by Yahweh. In similar fashion Israel’s ancestors, and their narratives in the Hebrew Bible, came to symbolize the covenantal obligations that bound Yahweh to his people. Thus the bones of the ancestors remain, entombed in writing. Yet these words were not “whitewashed sepulchers” (Matt 23:27), nor was the afterlife simply an Ur-grave. Collectively, the ancestors represented the afterlife ideal. Their memories were blessings (Prov 10:7) because they were monuments and names that stood for Yahweh’s historical relationship with Israel.

Eventually the afterlife ideal that the ancestors embodied faded into the background of their narratives. Over time, the monuments of their memories became obscured by the shadow of a new ideology of death. Heaven replaced the tomb, and the Greek concept of a disembodied, incorruptible soul substituted the ancient Near Eastern standard of a long-lasting name. This is an oversimplification of a complicated historical process of change. Certainly Josephus’s description of Jewish sectarian groups shows that by the first century CE there was no consensus of belief regarding death, resurrection, or the soul (*Jewish War* 2: 154–165; *Jewish Antiquities* 18: 11–22; see also Acts 23:6–8). But a shift in the meaning of the ancestors did occur in early Jewish society, a change that was subtle yet significant. The hope that the ancestors represented outlasted the afterlife ideal they once embodied. The dead of specific kinship groups were absorbed into the greater ancestors of Israel. The peoples replaced the fathers, to contrast the general ancestors of Genesis with the exclusive ones of Kings. Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones was a repository for all of Israel, not a bench tomb for one family. Narratives of bones would continue to be written, drawing from the old archetype of Near Eastern functional immortality, but the past they represented was now invoked to build foundations for communities of faith. Simeon ben Yeshua ben Eliazar ben Sira of Jerusalem provides an eloquent example from the Hellenistic period in the introduction

to his “Praise of Fathers.” In his crowded cemetery of names, the sage’s encomium rehearses the history of the great ancestors of biblical tradition. But he begins in a manner similar to Ezekiel’s narrative of the dry bones, gathering those remembered with those forgotten, embodying them together in writing, and enshrining them in the invisible tomb of his famous poem.²⁰

All these were honored in their generation, and their days were renowned. ⁸⁾ Some of them left behind a name so that they might be laid to rest upon their inheritance. ⁹⁾ But there are some among them who left without remembrance—they utterly ceased to be, like those who had never lived—so also their sons after them. ¹⁰⁾ Nevertheless these were men of faithfulness, and their hope will never be cut off. ¹¹⁾ Their goods are entrusted with their descendants, and their inheritance with the sons of their sons. ¹²⁾ Their descendants will stand in their covenant, and their posterity for their sake. ¹³⁾ Their remembrance will stand forever, and their righteousness will not be erased. ¹⁴⁾ Their bodies were gathered in peace, and their name lives from generation to generation. ¹⁵⁾ The congregation will tell of their wisdom and the assembly will recount their praise.

—Sir 44:7–15

20. Translated from Hebrew Manuscript B.

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